DISCOURSES

ON

LUXURY,

INFIDELITY,

AND

ENTHUSIASM.

BY

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TO

THE MOST NOBLE,

JOHN,

Duke of BEDFORD,

These DISCOURSES are,

With the utmost Humility,

And Respect,

Inscribed,

By the AUTHOR.

DISCOURSE I.

2 TIM. iii. 4.

Lovers of pleaſures more than lovers of God.

ALTHOUGH the with-holding ſome part of that homage, which is due to the Creator, may be conſidered only as an omiſſion of duty, yet to pay a much greater adoration, at the ſame time, to the creature, makes that omiſſion ſomething worſe than a mere negative offence, and, indeed, as widely different from it, as idolatry is from irreligion. To love pleaſure more than God, is rather

worſe than not to love him at all, ſince the effect of ſuch a preference will, in the end, turn out much the ſame, as that of real poſitive hatred. God is the only object that can challenge and deſerve the whole of our love, becauſe He alone is abſolutely and infinitely good: as for any of thoſe good things which He, in his gracious bounty, hath thought fit to beſtow upon us, they are good only upon the compariſon, and cannot therefore be entitled to any thing more than a certain limited meaſure of our love, juſt ſuch a ſhare only in our affections, as is ſuited to the ſubordinate degree of their relative goodneſs.

All things ought to be valued according to their true intrinſick worth: every real pleaſure, is a real good; to prize

prize and love it therefore, in ſome degree, as ſuch, is not only an allowable thing, but a matter of the ſtricteſt obligation; an inſtance of religious duty; for it is then alone that we are giving the beſt proof of our gratitude to the *author of every good gift*, when we make the moſt of his bleſſings, and rejoice in the poſſeſſion of our lot. Was there any thing criminal merely in the enjoyment of pleaſure, our Creator would never have placed us under an inevitable neceſſity of incurring guilt this way; and yet we find that many gratifications are, in a manner, forced upon our ſenſes; we are abſolutely conſtrained, as it were, to admit of a great variety of pleaſures, in ſatisfying even the neceſſary demands of nature ſo that one can hardly

conceive it poſſible for the moſt ſelf-denying creature in the world, to defraud himſelf entirely of all thoſe pleaſurable recreations, which he is, at once, no leſs fully privileged, than completely fitted, to enjoy: the ſeverity of his own diſpoſition towards himſelf, muſt often be in vain exerted to over-rule the more merciful intention of his Creator; and in ſpite of all his perverſe expedients to imbitter the draught of life, the benevolent hand of providence will be continually caſting in ſome reliſhing mixture, ſome palatable drops to ſweeten his cup.

But notwithſtanding all that has been, or can be ſaid, in the behalf of pleaſure, yet it muſt ſtill be allowed, that there is a wide difference between voluptuouſneſs, and inſenſibility; between re-

renouncing one's animal nature entirely, and being a perfect ſlave to it. Though the love of pleaſure, conſidered as a real good, is not to be condemned in all caſes, and in all degrees, as if it was abſolutely criminal in itſelf, yet will it immediately become ſo, when the greatneſs of the paſſion exceeds the value of the object; or when it interferes with the enjoyment of better things, and calls off our hearts from the ſovereign fountain of all perfection and goodneſs. For nothing ſurely can be more evident, than that He, from whom all our enjoyments are derived, ought to be the ultimate object of all our love. Every affection therefore, that has the leaſt tendency to weaken, or alienate, the attachments of our gratitude to

God, nay, every affection that is not accompanied with ſome ſuch endearing convictions of his goodneſs, as ſhall quicken and improve, at the ſame time, our affection for Him, muſt, at once, be extremely abſurd, ungrateful, and impious; abſurd, in that it purſues an inferior ſatisfaction to the prejudice of an infinitely ſuperior delight; ungrateful, becauſe it neglects the giver for the ſake of his gift; and impious, by denying, or at leaſt depretiating, the adorable perfections of the Supreme Being.

God is ſaid to be *jealous of his honour*, not becauſe He himſelf has any rival to fear, but becauſe He hath made us conſcious how much it is our duty and intereſt, to keep a watchful eye over the luſts of our hearts, leſt

they ſhould tempt us to ſet up ſome idol of pleaſure in competition with Him. And He hath commanded us *to love him with all our ſouls*, not becauſe our love can be of any real benefit to him, but becauſe it is ſure to excite in us a deſire of imitating his adorable perfections, and by that means, to advance us to the greateſt attainable heights both of the dignity and happineſs of our nature. Hence it is, that we are required to love Him in ſuch a manner, as if every thing elſe was quite unworthy of the leaſt conſideration, as indeed, comparatively ſpeaking, it is: hence it is, that we are required to devote ourſelves entirely to the ſtudy and obſervance of his gracious will; to take delight in nothing, any further than that it is

found a means of exciting in us a warmer affection for Him; till the influence of every earthly good, ſhall be quite loſt and abſorbed, as it were, in a predominant reliſh for heavenly pleaſures; and we may, almoſt ſtrictly ſpeaking, be ſaid to *love Him with* all *our mind*, *with* all *our ſoul*, *and with* all *our ſtrength*.

Thus have I briefly endeavoured to give you a general illuſtration, how far the love of pleaſure may be brought to coincide with the love of God; and in what caſes and circumſtances they muſt neceſſarily interfere, and prove inconſiſtent with each other.—But my principal intention, at preſent, is to take a nearer and more confined view of the text; to conſider it only in thoſe particular lights, wherein it will ad-

admit of a ſeaſonable application to the preſent times.—In purſuance of this deſign, I ſhall, in the firſt place,

I. Give you ſome little ſketch of the ruling manners of the age, in order to ſhow, to what a remarkable and extravagant degree, we are become *lovers of pleaſures, more than lovers of God.*—Secondly,

II. I ſhall inquire into the merits of two particular pleas, that have been urged in the defence of luxury.—And Thirdly,

III. I ſhall endeavour to demonſtrate, that a general love of pleaſure, will be ſure to raiſe ſuch an univerſal ſpirit of luxury, as muſt inevitably terminate in the utter ruin of every nation where it prevails.

I. First then, I am to give you some little sketch of the ruling manners of the age, in order to show, to what a remarkable and extravagant degree, we are become *lovers of pleasures, more than lovers of God.*

Whether those *last* days, wherein St. *Paul* hath foretold that men should be *lovers of pleasures, more than lovers of God*, are at length arrived, I will not pretend to determine; but thus much I think is certain, that these our present days do not want for a sufficient number of such men, to justify my urging the text, as a very seasonable subject of exhortation at least, if not in order to prove the accomplishment of a prophesy. That many of us, nay, that the generality of us, ought to be classed amongst this number, is,

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I apprehend, too ſelf-evident a truth, to need the leaſt illuſtration of any formal proof; a truth, too publick to be hid, and what is ſtill worſe, almoſt too faſhionable for any one to wiſh to hide it. An oſtentatious extravagance is continually diſplaying itſelf in every part of this voluptuous city, and amongſt all ranks and conditions of men. An emulous endeavour to outvie each other in all the elegant accommodations of life, ſeems to be, not only the ruling principle of a few, but the main ambition of a vaſt majority; the characteriſtick, and almoſt univerſal paſſion of the age. There is ſcarce any one, but ſeems to be aſhamed, as it were, of living within the compaſs of his own proper ſphere, be it either great or ſmall. How many

wealthy

wealthy men may one daily ſee, who, notwithſtanding all their riches, are continually labouring under the greateſt imaginable diſtreſſes; continually repining at their increaſing wants, in that worſt ſtate of indigence, a ſplendid poverty. In vain are they poſſeſſed of a fortune, which is more than ſufficient to procure them all the real conveniencies of life, whilſt a luxurious taſte is for ever enlarging their deſires beyond the extent of their abilities; and tempting them to anticipate their revenues, till they have only the mortification to find that their vanity can no more be checked, than it can be ſatisfied; that their wealth has not enabled them to relieve half ſo many natural wants, as it has created fantaſtical ones, which no income whatſoever

ever could ſupply them with ſufficient means to gratify. Nor is this vice confined to thoſe alone who affect a prodigality beyond the real profuſion of their plenty: but the ſame vain-glorious extravagance, that drains off ſo much more than the ſuperfluities of the affluent in high life, is no leſs frequent amongſt the middling ſort of people. Many of theſe alſo, are ſo ſtrangely infatuated with the enchantments of a faſhionable extravagance, that they ſeem to have taken up a perſuaſion, that it is impoſſible for them to live with any tolerable credit, but at the expence of their happineſs; that the moſt coſtly ſacrifice which they can make to their vanity, is but a neceſſary offering paid to decency and good-breeding; that to ſubmit to the greateſt

greateſt real diſtreſs, is much better than to ſuffer under any imputation of it; much wiſer to ſtarve, as it were, under the creditable appearances of plenty, than to diſgrace themſelves by betraying the leaſt ſymptom of want. Nay, many amongſt the very loweſt of the vulgar, have likewiſe in this caſe, as they generally do in all others, ſo well copyed the example of their ſuperiors, that even meanneſs loves to be diſplaying ſome ambitious epitome of grandeur, and poverty itſelf affects to make a figure in its little circle of extravagancies. In ſhort, pleaſure is not only become a buſineſs itſelf, but the parent alſo of an infinite variety of other occupations, that are entirely ſubſervient to it; ſo many, that 'tis doubtful, whether the commerce

merce of vanity and intemperance, be not the principal traffick of the nation; whether vice and folly do not ſupport as great a trade amongſt us, as all the arts and ſciences, which are any ways neceſſary, or ſerviceable to the commonwealth, put together.—And this is a circumſtance which leads me directly to the ſubject, which belongs to the ſecond part of my diſcourſe, wherein I propoſed,

II. To inquire into the merits of two particular pleas, which have been urged in the defence of luxury.

The truth of the obſervation which I have juſt now made, relating to the commerce of luxury, has been caught at by one of its patrons *, as a ſufficient vindication of the moſt exceſſive

* The author of the Fable of the Bees.

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debaucheries; and many ingenious concluſions has he drawn from thence, in order to prove, that every article of private luxury, as ſuch, muſt be a national emolument; nay, that nothing but the prodigality of individuals, can be a certain ſource of affluence to the whole community. I ſhall content myſelf with urging a few remarks only in refutation of this plea, as its weakneſs has been ſo often, and ſo ſufficiently expoſed already, by others.

The ſagacious author of this noble diſcovery could clearly perceive, and therefore, was eaſily enabled to prove, that the extravagance of a few, muſt needs promote the employment, and thereby contribute to the ſupport of many. This indeed enabled him to begin his building on a firm and ſolid foun-

foundation: and having erected a ſuperſtructure according to his favourite plan, he thought he had indeed completed his deſign, thought he had really built an impregnable fortreſs, for the refuge and defence of every abandoned debauchee. This he conſidered as a moſt excellent diſcovery in favour of all voluptuous exceſſes; ſince it would enable every wealthy profligate to avail himſelf of an inference, that might make a merit of his luſt, and convert the waſteful profuſions of an intemperate ſelfiſhneſs, into a widely-ſpreading fountain of the moſt diſintereſted benevolence. It was not, it ſeems, enough for him to dethrone and inſult virtue, as a uſeleſs or pernicious uſurper, but the atchievement muſt be completed in the

triumph and eſtabliſhment of vice, as the only ſufficient guardian of human ſociety. But ſurely it can never follow, that *private vices are publick benefits*, merely becauſe they promote a circulation of wealth, unleſs it can be proved, at the ſame time, that there is no poſſibility of having the ſame thing effected by any other means. And yet why, in the name of goodneſs, ſhould not private virtues be altogether as ſerviceable to the publick in the very ſame way? Can any reaſon be aſſigned, why a chriſtian charity may not give as much, as any heatheniſh prodigality can throw away; why a liberal generoſity may not as eaſily diſtribute its bounty through a circle of honeſt dependents, as the moſt profligate in-

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temperance can ſcatter its rewards amongſt the panders of iniquity? Undoubtedly it may: undoubtedly virtue may diſtribute its wealth as well as vice; but then, indeed, it will be with this very material difference; that the wealth of virtue will fall only into thoſe hands, which need and deſerve it moſt; whereas that of vice, will become the property of ſuch as are the ſcandal and reproach, and muſt, in the end, prove the deſtruction of every nation, where they are ſupported and encouraged.

But ſuppoſing the *lovers of pleaſure* ſhould be obliged to give up this argument, yet ſtill they have in reſerve another, and much better plea; ſuch a one as cannot fail of affording them a ſufficient vindication

for their choice of a luxurious life. "Never ſurely," ſays an ingenious writer*, "can our imaginations reſt "wholly in the mere *mechanic* and "*ſenſible* forms of *beauty*, ſeeing there "is provided for them a far more *re* "*fined* entertainment, in the *theory* of "*moral* excellence.——As abſtracted "a way of reaſoning as it may be "thought, 'tis however a very juſt

* The author of letters from Philemon to Hydaſpes, Converſation 2d p. 13. Though I am clearly convinced that the doctrine in the paſſage above cited, is not only extravagantly abſurd in itſelf, but very pernicious alſo in its tendency, yet I would not be underſtood to call in queſtion the good ſenſe of its author in any other inſtance, nor his good intention, even in this. It ſeems, indeed, to have been a favourite notion with ſeveral other writers of eminent character for refined ſentiment, and elegant compoſition; and this affords a further reaſon for the expediency of refuting it.

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" one; that a *correct imagination*, and " a *diſſolute character*, are the greateſt " *contradictions* in the world. 'Tis " thus that I have ſometimes been " led to conſider the *virtuoſo arts* as a " more *refined* and *diſguiſed* ſort of " *moral diſcipline*; by which men of " *freer* ſpirits are ſometimes *unawares* " trained up to a ſenſe of *duty* and " *inward worth*, who would never be " prevailed upon to liſten to a more " *direct* and *formal* method of inſtruc- " tion." Here then you ſee what noble effects are to be expected from a fine taſte for the extravagancies of life; how much the delicacy of our moral ſenſe may be improved by our refinements in luxury; how effectually the practice of virtue may be promoted by the *love of pleaſure*.

It may be worth while to illuſtrate this matter a little more particularly. Whoever has really a nice ſenſe of what is juſt and becoming in matters of outward grace and ornament, muſt, it is thought, be ſure to preſerve a ſuitable decorum in the inward frame and diſpoſition of his mind. The man, for inſtance, who, on a true principle of taſte, loves to have every thing in the moſt perfect order about his perſon, his houſe, and his gardens, can hardly, it is thought, be ſuch an inward ſloven at the ſame time, as to neglect the more important furniture of his underſtanding, and pay no regard to the moral embelliſhment of his mind. And hence, it ſeems, we are to infer, that there is a natural connexion between an elegant

gant taſte for whatever is proper and beautiful in outward objects, and a refined perception of every thing that relates to a more excellent kind of elegance, to a correctneſs of ſentiment, politeneſs of manners, and a general regularity of conduct.

Now, it muſt be confeſſed, there is ſomething extremely pretty in this new ſyſtem of morals; and it is moreover ſuch a ſyſtem, as would be admirably well fitted for the reformation of the preſent times, could it but be made as ſucceſsful in its application to practice, as it is ingeniouſly contrived in the theory. For however unconcerned many of our modern fine gentlemen may be, whether they are thought to have any religion or not, yet there is no doubt but

they would be very loth to paſs for people that had reſigned all pretenſions to a good taſte. And, methinks, it would be extremely fortunate, if one could by any method, ſo far impoſe upon the weakneſs of their imaginations, as to perſuade folly to do the proper buſineſs of wiſdom; inſtruct pride how to ſupply the defects of every better principle; and lay whim and fancy under an obligation of diſcharging the peculiar duties of reaſon and conſcience. This would certainly be an excellent artifice; a very happy expedient for drawing good out of evil: and truely, as the caſe ſtands, it may, perhaps, be adviſable for us to make the moſt of it; for popular vices and follies have often, I believe, a natural tendency to make

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a nation abſolutely incorrigible by any other means, than a ſkilful management of thoſe very principles, from which they derive their original: juſt in the ſame manner as it happens with ſome poiſonous animals, which are ſaid to contain within themſelves, the only ſufficient antidote againſt their own proper venom.

And yet, it is to be feared, that our ſagacity might be long enough employed in analyzing the principles of a luxurious taſte, before we ſhould be able to diſcover any ſuch good quality belonging to it, as would be ſufficiently powerful to counterwork the malignant operation of all its contrary properties. For, to put things upon the moſt favourable ſuppoſition, let it be granted for the preſent, that there

there is really ſuch a connexion between taſte and virtue, as muſt render it eminently wrong and improper for a man of a correct fancy, to lead an irregular life; that ſuch a one, as diſtinguiſhed from men of coarſer imaginations, is laid under a peculiar obligation to manifeſt as much exactneſs in the regulation of his paſſions and appetites, as in any other inferior concern; and to make his love of beauty appear uniformly conſpicuous, throughout every part of his conduct. But if we conſider the nature of this extraordinary obligation, we ſhall ſee but little reaſon to expect any conſiderable effects from it. Here is a new and additional motive indeed to the practice of virtue; but what is it? whence does it ariſe? from any moral ſource?

ſource? from any increaſe of evidence, or freſh ſenſe of duty? no; this is foreign to the ſuppoſition: the only motive, which the caſe before us will admit of, muſt be derived either from the mere propriety of maintaining a conſiſtency of character, or the bare abſurdity of a contrary behaviour. And what influence can any conſiderations of this ſort be ſuppoſed to have, where they can alone be wanted, that is, on thoſe who are not to be affected by motives of infinitely ſuperior importance? what indeed? look abroad into the world, and you will be able to judge: there you will be ſure to find examples, more than enough to convince you, that they have no influence at all; or rather, indeed, to convince you, that the ſuppoſition

poſition we have here been reaſoning from, has not the leaſt foundation in the nature of things; that it is a mere groundleſs conceit, to imagine that no man can enjoy a true taſte of order and propriety in any one inſtance, without having, as it were, a conſtitutional reliſh for them in every other.

It is very probable indeed, that the ſame nicety of diſcernment which produces a true reliſh of beauty, in any one inſtance, may produce it likewiſe in all other inſtances, where the objects themſelves are allied by any participation of the ſame common nature: but what affinity can there be between virtue and matter? what ſimilitude between an object of reaſon, and an object of ſenſe? what connexion

nexion between a free act of the mind, and a neceſſary paſſive impreſſion? However numerous and various our obligations may be to the practice of virtue, yet it is abſolutely impoſſible that any of them ſhould be derived from the principles of taſte; for the moral influence of every conſideration will be greater or leſs, in proportion as it tends, not to improve and ſecure the pleaſures of the imagination, but only to correct and engage the affections of the heart.

The ſame terms, it is true, may be indiſcriminately made uſe of to ſignify very different things: but it is not a promiſcuous uſe of words that can confound any of thoſe eſſential differences, which reſult from the nature of

of the things themſelves. To talk of the beauty of virtue, for inſtance, will not make virtue an object of ſenſe; nor are its charms of ſuch a nature, as to render it more likely for a man of the fineſt eye to be enamoured with them, than for one who is utterly deprived of his ſight: there is nothing in ſuch a defect that can diſqualify him from being as accurate a diſtinguiſher between right and wrong, in matters of a moral conſideration, as any virtuoſo whatſoever. No, this is ſo far from being the caſe, that, on the contrary, nothing can be more probable, than that a blind man will be the more virtuous, merely becauſe he has no opportunity of learning any leſſons in that worſt ſchool of viſion, where the *virtuoſo arts* are giv-

ing their inſtruction how to gratify the *luſt of the eyes*, and to diſplay the *pride of life*.

Not that I would be underſtood to repreſent theſe arts as abſolutely exceptionable upon every account, but only as they ſeem more likely to adminiſter to vice, than to promote the practice of virtue. There is always ſomething in the delights they afford, which renders them rather dangerous with reſpect to their moral influence. They may indeed be innocently enjoyed; but whenever they are ſo, it is more owing to ſome previous rectitude in the diſpoſition of the mind, than to any conſequential turn of temper, ariſing from the reforming power of a correct fancy. If they who are moſt converſant with them preſerve their

their virtue, the ſupport of it will certainly be owing to a reliance on ſome ſafer principles for its foundation: if they, whoſe ſituation in life ſecludes them from ſuch enjoyments, fall from their integrity, the loſs of it will as ſurely proceed from the want of ſome more efficacious means for its preſervation.

The men of *freer ſpirits* who are ſo fond of diſplaying themſelves and their fine equipages, at all the moſt polite places of publick reſort, would not, I conceive, have ſuffered any great loſs, as to their virtue, nor probably in any other reſpect, if they had never frequented any of thoſe places in their life. They who regale every day in the moſt elegant and ſumptuous manner, and adorn themſelves

ſelves with the beſt fancied ornaments that art and nature can produce, may very poſſibly be brought by ſuch means, to a ſincere repentance, a repentance of their extravagancies at leaſt, if not for their ſins; and yet, if the delicacy of their taſte would but ſuffer them to make an occaſional trial, even of ſo contrary an expedient, as that of *faſting in ſackcloth and aſhes*, it would, I verily believe, and in the way of *moral diſcipline*, be altogether as ſerviceable to them.

Theſe repreſentations are not made with any intent to prove, that all the elegant accommodations of life are neceſſarily pernicious, but only to illuſtrate the abſurdity of ſuppoſing, that they can have any beneficial influence on our morals. The object under

conſideration, at preſent, is not the lawfulneſs, but the pretended practical uſefulneſs of theſe things; and however impertinent ſuch repreſentations would be juſtly thought, when conſidered as arguments againſt the one, yet I cannot but think them very appoſite, and perhaps the more ſo upon account of their ſingularity, when applied only to diſprove the other. It has been already granted that things of this ſort may be enjoyed with innocence; and I have this further obſervation to add, that it is impoſſible they ſhould be enjoyed, in the higheſt degree of perfection, without it. There is nothing that enlarges the ſphere of a man's delights ſo much as virtue; for, excluſive of that great variety of the moſt ſolid pleaſures which are entirely

tirely of its own procuring, it never fails to give an additional recommendation to every other inferior ſatisfaction, from whatever ſource it may happen to derive its original. Not that virtue is really capable of improving a man's taſte, in any reſpect, but then it will be always ſure to qualify him for as complete an enjoyment of it, in every reſpect, as his nature is capable of receiving; and for this very good reaſon, becauſe it will be always attended with that ſatisfactory complacency of mind, which is an eſſential, and perhaps the principal ingredient in every real enjoyment whatſoever. Indeed, when a moralizing temper, and a polite turn of fancy, (which are qualities perfectly compatible, though by no means inſeparable,

when theſe, I ſay, happen to meet in the ſame perſon, both the capacity, and the ſecurity of his happineſs will be greatly encreaſed by ſuch an alliance. If the objects he is moſt converſant with, are agreeable to his taſte, the peculiar pleaſures reſulting from that fortunate coincidence alone, will be complete and ſincere, without any ingredients of alloy to impair their perfection; ſhould his ſituation afford him but few opportunities of receiving any gratifications of this ſort, the privation would be too inconſiderable to be attended with the leaſt regret; ſince it is always in the power of virtue to communicate ſuch recommendations of its own, to the very worſt condition in life, as are infinitely preferable to all that art and nature

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can furniſh out for the beſt. Where there is ſuch an ample ſupply of ſatisfaction from within, there is but little need of any from without; and yet ſuch is the bleſſed privilege of a virtuous diſpoſition, that it can find matter of entertainment in almoſt every thing that falls in its way, whether it be accompanied with a fine taſte or not.

Such are the happy qualities of virtue, whether with or without the conjunction of a refined taſte; whereas a refined taſte, on the contrary, if it be not accompanied with virtue, will inevitably become the moſt pernicious talent in the world: nor is it difficult to aſſign a reaſon why it ſhould be ſo. All the more expenſive arts are the principal objects of taſte; of taſte, I

mean, in that limited ſenſe, in which alone I am here ſuppoſed to conſider it: now, an extraordinary capacity for the enjoyment of theſe, will naturally give ſome additional ſtrength to the ordinary temptations of vanity and luxury: and where an uncommon paſſion meets with peculiar incitements on the one hand, and no reſtraining conſiderations on the other, what is there, as far at leaſt as the inclination only is conſidered, that can prevent the moſt exceſſive gratification of that paſſion? nothing; there can be nothing to prevent it. And accordingly we find that they who have the moſt ſubtile fancies, are always, when this is the caſe, the moſt exquiſite of ſinners; their ſuperiority, in this reſpect, only giving them a keener reliſh for

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every more extravagant ſpecies of debauchery, and enabling them at once to heighten the natural temptation, as well as the natural ſinfulneſs of ſin, by artificial refinements. Inſtances of this ſort are ſo far from being rare, that nothing can be more remarkably frequent; nothing more common than to meet with thoſe, who ſhall be ready enough to indicate the niceſt delicacy of feeling, in matters of the moſt trifling conſideration, without giving one ſingle proof of its being accompanied with the leaſt ſenſibility of conſcience; neat to the greateſt imaginable exceſs in their apparel, but on purpoſe only to provoke a higher guſt for the turpitude of ſin; dread the leaſt ſpeck of natural filth on their bodies, whilſt they ſcruple not, at the

ſame time, to plunge their ſouls into the fouleſt ſink of moral corruption.— So weak and inſignificant are the laws of taſte; ſo groundleſs and fantaſtical are the obligations ariſing from the *morality of pleaſure.*

PART

PART II.

THUS have I gone through the two firſt heads which I propoſed to conſider; the character of the age, and the pleas for luxury. The pleas for luxury have, I truſt, been ſufficiently expoſed. The character given of the age, is, I fear, as a general one, too juſt to be called in queſtion; and I would not be underſtood to repreſent it, as quite univerſal. Many, no doubt, are the exceptions which may be produced: and ſome comfort it is, to find that there are a few amongſt

amongſt thoſe whoſe example may be ſuppoſed to have ſome conſiderable influence, a few, I ſay, even amongſt thoſe, who have reſolute integrity enough to diſcountenance the faſhionable depravities of a leading majority, and are neither afraid, nor aſhamed, to diſtinguiſh themſelves by a publick-ſpirited ſimplicity of manners, though in the midſt of a vain, ſelfiſh, and voluptuous generation. Nor ſhall I deny myſelf the ſatisfaction of owning, that we have ſome little matter of national credit, to place over againſt the preponderating ſcale of national diſgrace; ſome few prevailing virtues, to be diſtinguiſhed amidſt a vaſtly diſproportionate multitude of reigning vices. But, notwithſtanding all the moſt favourable allowances that can be

be made, as it will ſtill be neceſſary, that the general character of the age ſhould be taken only from its moſt eminent and remarkable qualities, the preceding repreſentation, according to this rule, will undoubtedly appear to be no unjuſt deſcription of it. The picture, ſuch as it is, muſt needs be allowed, when viewed only in this general light, to bear a ſtrong reſemblance to the original. It may, perhaps, be ſketched out, rather in that particular ſtyle, by which the odiouſneſs and deformity of every feature, is fully preſerved in the coarſeneſs of the likeneſs. But what if it be? no one ſurely can think that the ſtrokes of a flattering pencil would have been more proper on ſuch a ſubject as this; or that there is any poſſibility of re-

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preſenting that in too odious a light, which muſt neceſſarily prove our deſtruction, either ſooner or later, if it does not meet with a ſeaſonable correction.—For the further illuſtration of this important truth, I ſhall now proceed, as I propoſed, in the laſt place,

III. To demonſtrate that a general love of pleaſure, will be ſure to raiſe ſuch an univerſal ſpirit of luxury, as muſt inevitably terminate in the utter ruin of every nation where it prevails.

Suppoſe then, and for the preſent I mean to argue upon ſuppoſition only, ſuppoſe I ſay, that there is a whole nation of men, whoſe predominant paſſion is a love of pleaſure. Now let us conſider what muſt neceſſarily be the

the final conſequence of ſuch a paſſion. In the firſt place, as the good things of this life muſt be conſidered by them as the only means of happineſs, the ſole endeavour of each would, of courſe, be to get as large a portion of them as he poſſibly could. The ſucceſs of thoſe who obtained the moſt, would naturally excite the envy of the reſt: that envy would naturally heighten the eagerneſs of their firſt deſires, and add the ſpur of ambition to accelerate their purſuit. Such a general emulation would ſoon beget a faſhionable ſpirit of extravagance; and their pride and love of pleaſure would be ſure to increaſe in a greater proportion, than any proviſion that could poſſibly be made for the gratification of them. This would

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be the neceſſary final effect of a national love of pleaſure, and ſuch the gradual advances that would lead to the production of it.

But let us take a view of the progreſs of this paſſion in a different light: let us once more trace out the ſteps of its advancement, in order to conſider, not only its effects, but the particular means likewiſe by which they would be produced. Now money is abſolutely neceſſary to promote the gratification of this paſſion; ſince nothing elſe can command the pleaſurable accommodations of life. Money therefore will be always wanted by theſe people; wanted equally by all, with regard to the degree of their wants, whatever difference there may be, as to the quantities which are

requi-

requiſite to relieve their ſeveral immediate diſtreſſes: for whether the ſum in requeſt be ten, ten hundred, or ten thouſand pounds, it is eaſy to conceive how a man's indigence may, in either caſe, be exactly the ſame. This want of money, conſidered as a thing abſolutely neceſſary to their happineſs, will lay them under the ſtrongeſt temptation to procure it almoſt upon any terms. As their love of pleaſure will neceſſarily keep them poor; ſo their poverty will hardly ſuffer them to be honeſt: for as *Solomon* hath very wiſely remarked, *he that loveth pleaſure ſhall be a poor man; and he that maketh haſte to be rich, ſhall not be innocent.* Nothing therefore will be thought either too baſe and ſordid for them to ſubmit to, or too bold and hazard-

hazardous for them to adventure upon, for the ſake of money. Proofs of this will appear throughout the whole community. Hence the low vulgar prodigal will endeavour to ſupport himſelf in his leſs expenſive extravagancies, by the ſmaller profits of little cheats, and petty thieveries: hence the ſpendthrift gentleman, in higher life, will apply himſelf to the ſtudy of a *Hoyle* or *Demoivre*, in order to be inſtructed in the myſteries of gaming: and if the die and the card ſhould happen to fruſtrate his golden expectations; and no art, no ſkill, can totally elude the turns of chance; the piſtol and the maſk muſt ſupply their place, and the highwayman recruit the broken gameſter: hence likewiſe the deep-mortgaged, though

richly penſioned, ſtateſman will be obliged, in order to relieve his ſtill ſuperior diſtreſſes, to betake himſelf to ſome grander expedient of iniquity; nothing leſs than the plunder of the publick, will be found ſufficient to anſwer what he will conſider only as his neceſſary occaſions; nor will even this be able to ſupport him long; but the poor man's exigencies will become more and more preſſing, till he is at length conſtrained, to make the beſt bargain he can of his impoveriſhed country, as the only poſſible way for him to keep himſelf, or I ſhould rather ſay his vanity, from ſtarving.

As I fear there can be but little occaſion for me to point out the application of all this, I ſhall leave you to make it for yourſelves, to make it as

far as you think it can juſtly be carried; for I would not, by any means, be underſtood to have drawn this as an exact parallel of our own caſe. God forbid, indeed, that our condition ſhould be ſo bad, as that of the nation before deſcribed; but very bad undoubtedly it is, in the very ſame way, though not in the ſame degree. And it ſhould be conſidered, that as the effects of a cauſe, whoſe operation is partial, are not the leſs real, becauſe upon the whole they are leſs ſenſibly felt, ſo neither may they be leſs fatal, upon account of the ſlowneſs of their increaſe. We are already far advanced in the ſame deſtructive road of luxury, ſo far, that if ſome method be not, in due time, taken to reſtrain our progreſs, we muſt neceſ-

ſarily ſink into contempt and wretchedneſs, as individuals, and, notwithſtanding all our late ſucceſſes, be inevitably loſt, as an independent people.

But it may be ſaid, what would you have us do in this caſe? what untried expedient can you recommend, that will be likely to prevent the increaſe of luxury? would the enacting a ſet of ſumptuary laws, for inſtance, in order to limit the privileges of expence in every man, according to his particular rank and fortune; would ſuch a ſcheme, do you think, be likely to put any ſtop to this growing evil? If it were poſſible, by ſuch a proceeding, to regulate every ones pride likewiſe in the ſame proportion, it would undoubtedly anſwer the end propoſed; but if not, and it is evi-

dently abſurd to ſuppoſe it ſhould, it would rather be more likely to raiſe a civil war amongſt us, than to give the leaſt check to the progreſs of luxury. All legal reſtraints and penalties would therefore prove abſolutely ineffectual: the evil is evidently placed beyond the reach of any remedy that cannot affect the heart; and it would be altogether as abſurd to aim at checking its increaſe, by any expedient of this ſort, as it would be, to think of abating a man's hunger, by laying him under a difficulty to get at food. What will it ſignify to throw ſuch obſtructions in a man's way, as will be more apt to raiſe an additional eagerneſs to perſevere in the ſame courſe, than to ſtop his progreſs in it? what will it ſignify to guard the object, whilſt the

paſſion for it continues without reſtraint; nay, whilſt the very difficulty to procure it, may itſelf prove a freſh incitement to the attempt? Depend upon it the exceſſes of luxury are no otherwiſe to be ſuppreſſed, than by extinguiſhing all inclination for them. But is there then any poſſible way of effecting this? one there is, and one only; for the ſucceſs of which I might very confidently engage, and have only to wiſh I was equally aſſured that it would be followed. However that may be, the way I mean is, —to bring ourſelves to a practical perſuaſion of the great truths of religion. Were we all to be really, and in fact, what too many of us are aſhamed to be, even in profeſſion; were we all to be ſincere believers of

the goſpel of Chriſt, and, in conſequence of that, *lovers of God more than lovers of pleaſures*; how wonderfully, how happily would the ſcene be changed? every national, and every private diſtreſs, would then at once be effectually removed. All our exceſſes would then diſappear, and all our wants would vaniſh together with them. The temperate and induſtrious poor would be ſufficiently enabled, either by the honeſt toil of their own hands, or the charitable aſſiſtance of others, to ſatisfy all the real wants of nature; and that, with the poſſeſſion of a good conſcience, would be found enough to ſatisfy all their deſires too. The rich likewiſe, as they would then be no longer engaged in any abſurd attempts to ſatisfy the demands of vanity,

vanity, abſurd, becauſe its demands are endleſs, and therefore muſt be denied at laſt, the rich, I ſay, would then alſo find they had enough for all the valuable purpoſes of wealth; enough to purchaſe all the beſt, all the real enjoyments of life: not the ſenſual pleaſures of a debauched and luxurious taſte; not the mean gratifications of a ſordid ſelfiſhneſs; but far ſuperior delights:—the heart-felt indulgence of a benevolent diſpoſition; the generous manly joys of a publick-ſpirited liberality; and the ſolid religious ſatisfaction, of having approved themſelves *faithful ſtewards of that God, who giveth them all things richly to enjoy.*

Could we but bring ourſelves to pay a ſerious attention to the great

truths of the goſpel, we ſhould ſoon know how to form a right apprehenſion of the nature, the condition, and the circumſtances of our preſent exiſtence, and be able to diſcover the general ends of providence in ordaining them to be ſuch as they are; to view ourſelves, the world, and every thing belonging to it in a true and proper light. And with ſuch a ſecurity againſt all thoſe deluſive appearances, which pride, ſenſuality and covetouſneſs would otherwiſe give to the more ſhowy, but leaſt eſſential parts of human happineſs, we ſhould ſoon learn to ſuppreſs our envy and repining at the unequal diſtribution of thoſe advantages, which diſtinguiſh men only as to their preſent outward circumſtances;

ſtances; and become, all of us, equally well ſatisfied with the various privileges, and ſolicitous only to diſcharge the ſeveral duties, of our reſpective ſtations.

We ſhould then conſider our condition here upon earth, as that of ſtrangers and pilgrims in a foreign country, where as we know it is impoſſible for us to continue long, ſo may we eaſily be convinced, that there is nothing to be met with in it, of ſuch real ſufficiency to ſatisfy the natural deſires of our ſoul, as to make us think it better for us to continue here, than to arrive at our only proper home, at that father's houſe, where we can alone depend upon an entire freedom from all our cares, as well as the

the ſecure enjoyment of our greateſt poſſible happineſs.

We ſhould conſider the world, as a place ordained on purpoſe to anſwer the ſame ends of providence, with regard to all mankind in general, as the wilderneſs did, with reſpect to the children of Iſrael in particular; that is, as a ſimilar ſtate of probation, wherein we are appointed to undergo the diſcipline of providence, for a certain number of years, as a neceſſary preparation for our admittance into another, and far more deſirable *land of promiſe*, *a Canaan* infinitely preferable to that *which flowed with milk and honey*.

We ſhould conſider all the things which belong to this world, as too vain and empty to be ſought after with

with the leaſt ſolicitude, by beings that are born to ſo much better hopes. We ſhould find that there are but few things here below, that are truely deſirable for their own ſakes; and that it is for want of conſidering them as convenient means only to ſome more valuable end, that we are ſo often diſappointed in our expectations about them. But when we had once learnt to rectify this miſtake, and to direct the main ſcope of all our endeavours, to the attainment of happineſs hereafter, a very conſiderable ſhare of unexpected happineſs would be ſure to fall in our way here. Eaſe, tranquillity, and moderate enjoyments would be the natural reſult of ſuch a conduct, and with that we ſhould be perfectly well ſatisfied, as we ſhould then

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be convinced, that it is all our preſent condition will admit of for any continuance; and that to aim at any thing more, would be only to lay out for the vexation of a needleſs diſappointment.

Nor ſhould we then be in any danger of valuing the wealth of this world, beyond the meaſure of its real uſefulneſs. If we were poſſeſſed of it, in the greateſt abundance, it would be ſo far from encouraging us in any ſelfiſh intemperance, or trifling diſſipation of thought, that it would rather prove an alarming incitement to the moſt charitable œconomy, and conſiderate diligence; and fill us with a religious ſolicitude in proportion to the importance of our truſt. We ſhould conſider our riches, in the light of

trials,

trials, as well as bleſſings; as talents no leſs precarious than valuable; and be well aſſured that they will turn out to a moſt fatal account againſt us, at the great day of reckoning, if we do not endeavour to ſanctify the periſhable *Mammon of unrighteouſneſs*, by embracing every opportunity of laying it out in the purchaſe of *everlaſting habitations*.—And if on the other hand, it ſhould not be in our power to acquire any conſiderable degree of wealth, by fair and laudable means, the failure of our endeavours, in ſuch a caſe, would be conſidered as the benevolent appointment of him, who beſt knows, in what circumſtances we ſhall make the moſt advantageous uſe of every other gift which he hath entruſted to our management; and would

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diſpoſe us to be thankful to him, for exempting us from ſuch temptations, as he foreſees would be too great for our virtue to encounter with. Or at leaſt, if it did not produce this its proper effect, it could not however give us the leaſt cauſe to regret the want of ſuch wealth, whoſe enjoyment can never be certain for a ſingle day, and whoſe poſſeſſion, if we could be ever ſo ſecure of its enjoyment, cannot poſſibly continue for many years. And eſpecially too, when we conſider, however ſlender our portion may be of theſe periſhable treaſures, that it is always in our power to entitle ourſelves to an ample inheritance of others, which are of infinitely greater value, thoſe never-failing treaſures in Heaven, *where neither moth, nor ruſt doth cor-*

corrupt, and where thieves do not break through, nor ſteal.

And though theſe conſiderations would direct us all to *ſet our affections on things above*, rather than *on things on the earth*; and, by that means, exempt even thoſe who are the worſt furniſhed with worldly accommodations, from any great ſolicitude about the attainment of more; yet no conſiderations of this ſort could be of the leaſt real hindrance to a calm and well-tempered diligence, in the purſuit of any temporal advantage whatſoever: not only becauſe the natural ſenſe of our weakneſs and indigence, would ſtill continue to be ſome unavoidable incitement to it; but becauſe we ſhould be convinced moreover, that ſuch a diligence will be abſolutely requiſite to

ſecure

ſecure our well-being in another life, though it ſhould not ſucceed as an effectual preſervative againſt any of the evil exigencies of this: for we have no encouragement given us to expect any retribution for our preſent wants, in the future bounty of providence, but upon the obſervance of this conditional duty, amongſt others, that we do not tempt that providence now, in this our day of trial, by relying on any thing more than the concurrence of his common and ordinary aſſiſtance, with our own beſt endeavours to provide for ourſelves.

And, on the other hand, though theſe conſiderations may make ſuch as *poſſeſs the good things of this world*, appear as if *they enjoyed them not*, yet would they, upon that very account, be

be the better qualified to receive from them all the real happineſs which they are capable of yielding; infinitely more than they would experience, if they were to ſet their hearts entirely upon them; infinitely more than they would find, if they were to ſeek after nothing elſe. Thus, and thus only, might we carry on our earthly purſuits, without loſing ſight of our heavenly intereſts; reconcile every true enjoyment of this world, with the wiſeſt preparation for the next; conſecrate the gratification of every ſenſe, and every paſſion, to the promotion of religion and virtue; and vindicate ourſelves as profeſſed *lovers of pleaſures*, whilſt we continue under the happy conviction, that it is impoſſible for us

to enjoy the beſt and the greateſt which human nature is capable of, without being ſincere and hearty *lovers of God.*

DIS-

DISCOURSE II.

PROVERBS xix. 27.

Ceaſe, my ſon, to hear the inſtruction that cauſeth to err from the words of knowledge.

THE words of the wiſe man may be applied as an earneſt exhortation, to avoid the converſation of thoſe profeſſed patrons of infidelity, who, not contented with keeping their irreligious opinions to themſelves, are continually endeavouring to gain others alſo over to their party, and to

ſtrengthen their cauſe by making as many proſelytes as they can. And yet it is to be feared, that this practice is become ſo common in theſe days, as to render it almoſt impoſſible for us to follow Solomon's advice in a literal ſenſe, almoſt impoſſible to avoid *hearing the inſtruction that cauſeth to err from the words of knowledge:* But although it may not be in our power to avoid *hearing* ſuch *inſtruction*, or, at leaſt, not without *going* quite *out of the world*; yet ſtill 'tis to be hoped, that we may be perſuaded not to *regard* it; that we may be convinced how much we ought to deſpiſe thoſe, who would teach us to bely our conſcience, and renounce our happineſs, in order that we may be thought the more rational.

But

But the infidels of theſe times are not the only, nor, indeed, the worſt enemies to the chriſtian religion: there are ſome even amongſt its warmeſt votaries, whoſe inſtruction ought to be ſhunned with as much caution, or treated, when unavoidable, with as little regard, as that of its avowed antagoniſts. To deviate ſtudiouſly into one extreme, is neither a greater nor more hurtful error, in this caſe, than to run blindfold into the contrary: an entire rejection of the uſe of reaſon being altogether of as much diſſervice to the cauſe of truth, as the moſt abuſive application of it: and it can hardly be queſtioned, whether the *tabernacle* of a *methodiſt* be not as prejudicial to true religion, as a *ſociety* of infidels; whether the *enthuſiaſt* does not

diſgrace it as much from the *pulpit*, as the infidel from the *ſcorner's* chair.

And as the *words of knowledge* may, with equal propriety, be made to ſignify the *doctrines* of the *goſpel*, as well as the *principles* of *reaſon*, I ſhall take the liberty of interpreting them in this double ſignification; and endeavour to prevent your being ſeduced by the *inſtruction* of thoſe who would *cauſe* you to *err from* them, in either ſenſe,

I. Firſt, By laying open the two principal ſources of infidelity, and giving a general illuſtration of its extreme folly and danger.

II. Secondly, By pointing out the characters, and expoſing the miſchievous effects of enthuſiaſm. And,

III. Thirdly, By adding ſome obſervations, in order to prove, that all true

true religion muſt be the reſult of a modeſt, diligent, and ſincere employment of our rational faculties.

I. Firſt, then I am to lay open the two principal ſources of infidelity, and to give a general illuſtration of its extreme folly and danger.

'Tis obſervable that men of looſe morals are generally very licentious in their converſation upon religious ſubjects; nor is it, indeed, any wonder that they ſhould be ſo; ſince infidelity does as naturally flow from a vicious diſpoſition of mind, as a ſtream from its ſource. When a man has gone on in a vicious courſe of life, for any conſiderable time, he cannot eaſily reconcile himſelf to the thoughts of returning. The way back again into the deſerted path of righteouſneſs,

is all againſt him; againſt the confirmed tendency of his inclinations, and contrary to the direction of his accuſtomed, and therefore his moſt favourite purſuits. The thoughts of repentance will afford him but a ſad proſpect: *a death unto ſin* will be dreaded as a *death* indeed, a *death* to the only pleaſures which he would wiſh to live for; and *a new birth unto righteouſneſs* will be conſidered only as a *regeneration* to a *mortifying* life, to a life of penance, toil, and wretchedneſs. He is ſenſible that a habit of intemperance cannot eaſily be ſhaken off, and a conſciouſneſs of the difficulty will diſcourage him from making the attempt. The confuſed ſtate of his mind, and that multiplicity of tranſgreſſions, which ſhould make an immediate

mediate examination of his ſpiritual affairs the more neceſſary, will only make him the more inclinable to poſtpone the account. And after having thus neglected, from time to time, to make any inquiry into the circumſtances of his ſoul, it is too probable he will be brought at length to fancy it an unneceſſary trouble; and take up a prodigal reſolution of ſquandering away the whole of that patrimony of happineſs, in a few years, which, with proper management, might have proved an inheritance of bliſs to all eternity. And when he has once reſolved to devote the whole portion of his allotted time in this life, to the immediate gratification of his luſts, and has thrown aſide all thoughts of laying up any proviſion of good works

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for the ſupport of his happineſs, in another life hereafter; 'tis very natural to expect that he ſhould then, like other ſpend-thrifts, in ſimilar circumſtances, give his extravagance the name of philoſophy; boaſt that he has wiſdom enough to embrace the preſent moment; wiſdom enough to be convinced that no poſſeſſion can be valuable, any further than as 'tis enjoyed; and deride the dull oeconomy of thoſe, who forbear to indulge themſelves in ſuch delights as may be immediately procured, in hopes of a reverſionary ſtock of happineſs in ſome other world, they know not when, or where. As for his part, he is not ſo eaſily to be talked out of his ſenſes: he knows better than to give up realities for mere ſhadows; and therefore,

let us eat and drink, for to morrow we die, ſhall become the only practical maxim of his belief, the only article of faith, which he ſhall think it worth his while to obſerve with any religious exactneſs. In ſhort, as he has but little reaſon to be pleaſed with the proſpect of a future life, he will, of courſe, endeavour to confine all his views to the preſent ſcene; will, of courſe, be very unwilling to believe, what he can have no intereſt in wiſhing to be true. And that no alarming light may break in upon the darkneſs of his mind, and diſturb the repoſe of ſelf-deluſion; reaſon itſelf ſhall be ſet as a guard to exclude its own evidence, and block up all the avenues of conviction; philoſophy ſhall be retained in the cauſe of ignorance; the

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words of knowledge ſhall be preſſed into the ſervice of *error*; and it ſhall go very hard, but he will demonſtrate the rectitude of his principles, and vindicate the wiſdom of his practice.

This is the uſual proceſs of that ſort of infidelity which proceeds from the *corruption of the heart*; and undoubtedly a very common, and a very dangerous ſort it is; though, perhaps, neither ſo frequent, nor ſo incurable, as that which derives its origin from the *pride of the head*.

The man that has a very confident opinion of the ſtrength of his underſtanding, will be almoſt ſure to attempt ſome extraordinary project, ſome very grand deſign. And 'tis well, if any thing leſs than an endeavour to ſet the whole world to rights, in matters

ters of the utmoſt importance, will ſuit the extenſive aims of his vanity. To detect errors in any particular art, or ſcience, in points, wherein only a few people are concerned, is but a limited glory, but a partial diſplay of the ſuperiority of his wiſdom: but religion, being a matter of equal, and univerſal concernment to all mankind, an aſſault upon that, perhaps, may be reckoned not altogether unworthy of his proweſs, an enterprize, in ſome meaſure adequate to the preſumed greatneſs of his abilities: and, whenever pride has once drawn a man into infidelity, there is but little likelihood of his being ever reclaimed: the ſame affectation of ſingularity, which tempted him to ſtrike out into a wrong way, at firſt, will, in a manner, oblige him to per-

perſevere in it as long as he lives. For what hope is there of that man's being ever perſuaded to renounce his principles, who has ſo connected the character of his underſtanding with the fate of his cauſe, as to think it would be impoſſible for him to acknowledge the weakneſs of the one, without ſacrificing the reputation of the other? Though his reluctant conſcience ſhould be continually reproaching the purpoſe of his pride, yet no conviction can perſuade the obſtinacy of ſelf-conceit, to renounce its pretenſions to infallibility. To retract his former errors, in order to let the world ſee that he is grown wiſer than he was before, is ſuch a way of exemplifying an improvement in knowledge, as his vanity has no notion of.

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Beſides, to own that he holds any ſentiments in common with the generality of the world, would be the deſtruction of all his glory; it would take him down from that eminence to which his vain imaginations had exalted him, and place him upon a level with thoſe groveling wretches, who can be content to mix with the vulgar herd, and pace on, undiſtinguiſhed, in the ſervile train of the many.

This, indeed, is a very deplorable infatuation; and men ſtand the more in need of being admoniſhed to guard againſt it, becauſe the beginnings of it are ſometimes ſo imperceptible, that they are in danger of rendering themſelves utterly incurable, even before they are well aware that they have received

ceived the leaſt infection. When men get into an argument upon religion in common converſation, they are often apt to ſay a great deal more than they think. They have very rarely, at firſt, any real preconcerted intention to invalidate the proofs of religion, but raiſe objections only out of an unmeaning fondneſs for argumentation; and level their logick as much againſt their own ſecret convictions, as the doctrines of the goſpel. But alas! 'tis very unſafe for any one to deſert the cauſe of truth, though it be with ever ſo inoffenſive and unmeaning a deſign: for he will unavoidably become more and more attached to the ſide he is engaged to defend: Oppoſition will, by degrees, give his paſſions an intereſt in the diſpute: and when it once comes

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to be conſidered, as a conteſt for the ſuperiority of judgment, his pride will be too apt to puſh him on with a deſire of victory: this will ſet him upon re-inforcing his arguments with freſh ſupplies, and inventing new ſalvos to evade the concluſions of his adverſary; till he ſhall, at length, make a convert where he leaſt expected or intended, and become an unhappy proſelyte to his own conceited ingenuity.

Though the folly and danger of infidelity, muſt in a great meaſure be expoſed by every attempt to lay open its principal ſources; yet as neither of theſe can be repreſented in too ſtrong a light, I ſhall endeavour to add a few ſuch general reflections, as will ſerve to give a fuller illuſtration of both.

And firſt, the infidel expoſes his folly, in that he is really quite the reverſe of what he pretends to be. It is his peculiar boaſt, that he has freed himſelf from all that prejudice, by which the generality of mankind are ſo apt to be enſlaved; and yet, perhaps, it is impoſſible to conceive a ſtronger inſtance of the dominion of prejudice, than that which he is ſo proud of diſplaying in his own conduct, as if he was, all the while, giving the moſt convincing proof of his peculiar exemption from it. It muſt be confeſſed indeed, that he is no bigot in the common and ordinary way; but then, however he may affect to deteſt the character, he is ſtill a bigot in another way, which is much more unaccountable, extravagant, and

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pernicious. And this imputation does he take abundant care to ſecure, by ſhowing that he has no other notion of avoiding one extreme, than by running into the contrary; no other notion of keeping himſelf free from the deluſions of ſuperſtition, or the extravagancies of enthuſiaſm, than by an entire rejection of the precepts and doctrines of all revealed religion whatſoever. He expreſſes great aſtoniſhment at the mean ſervility, and implicit confidence of thoſe, who have given up their underſtandings to be governed, at the arbitrary pleaſure of deſigning men, and made a voluntary ſacrifice of that native independency of thought, which is the univerſal birth-right, and the moſt valuable privilege of human nature: and yet

this ſame zealous champion for the cauſe of liberty, will by no means allow, that there is any poſſible way for another perſon, to ſhow that he thinks with freedom, but by thinking juſt in the ſame manner as he does himſelf. He exclaims againſt the inſolence of prieſts, and the impoſition of creeds; and yet he himſelf is, all the while, aſſuming the infallibility of a pope, and endeavouring to propagate and eſtabliſh ſuch a creed of his own, as is infinitely more abſurd than any thing that the greateſt legendary devotee was ever known to digeſt. For what can poſſibly exceed the credulity of that man, who is reſolved to believe the greateſt improbabilities that can well be imagined, rather than admit the truth of a fact, which is far from being

being incredible in itſelf, and is ſupported, at the ſame time, with more authentick credentials than were ever yet given to any other matter of fact whatſoever. And yet this, notwithſtanding any thing which he himſelf may profeſs, or think, to the contrary, is exactly the infidels caſe. *He ſtrains at a gnat*, whilſt he makes no difficulty of *ſwallowing a camel*; places a *mountainous faith* in what is almoſt *impoſſible*, and yet has it not equal to a *grain of muſtard-ſeed*, in what has nearly the evidence of *demonſtration*.

Such would be the folly of infidelity, were we to conſider the chriſtian religion only as a matter of indifferent ſpeculation, as a ſubject that could not be of the leaſt intereſting concern to us, whether it ſhould prove

true or falſe. But when we conſider it as being, what in reality it is, an expreſs and poſitive law, commanding our obedience, on ſuch ſanctions, as muſt render it of infinite importance to us, if it be true; we ſhall find that the foregoing inſtances of the infidels folly are as nothing, in compariſon of that deſperate riſque which he runs, in treating it as a mere human invention, before he can clearly demonſtrate the impoſſibility of its being a divine inſtitution. And yet, inſtead of entering into a ſincere, modeſt, and diligent examination of all that can be brought to eſtabliſh the truth of the goſpel, which is an employment that would at once fall within the ſphere of his duty, as well as the compaſs of his abilities; inſtead of this, I ſay, he

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is ſo preſumptuous as to ſit in judgment only upon thoſe particulars of our redemption through Chriſt, which are ſo far from being ſufficiently obvious for his examination, that even the *angels* themſelves *do in vain deſire to look into them.* Becauſe he is not clearly ſatisfied about the fitneſs and expediency of thoſe terms of acceptance, which God hath ſo graciouſly offered to penitent ſinners, therefore he is reſolved to reject them. Aſtoniſhing madneſs! the condemned criminal diſclaims the mercy of his judge, and will not vouchſafe to accept a pardon, unleſs the peculiar fitneſs and propriety of the method by which it is conveyed to him, be at the ſame time explained to his ſatisfaction. But he would do well to conſider, that his

not being able to ſee why God ſhould grant redemption to ſinners, only through the mediation of Chriſt, is no ſort of proof, that He will grant it upon any other account: and that his rejecting the evidence of the goſpel, only becauſe he does not approve of its doctrine, will by no means afford him any excuſe for his infidelity, or the leaſt ſecurity againſt his being tried and condemned, according to the tenor of that goſpel, hereafter.

This is ſuch a conſideration as can hardly fail, one would think, of having ſome influence on every one that is capable of being affected by any thing at all: and yet there are rational creatures, men at leaſt who pretend to be ſuch, that ſhall make no ſcruple of rejecting that goſpel, at a venture,

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which nevertheleſs, if it be true, there can be nothing of chance or uncertainty as to the deplorable conſequence of their rejecting it: for if the goſpel be a divine revelation, it is certain that God hath therein expreſly declared it to be the irreverſible purpoſe of his eternal pleaſure, that *the promiſe in Chriſt ſhould be Yea and Amen*; that *there is none other name, under Heaven, given among men, whereby we muſt be ſaved*; and that, though *Heaven and earth ſhould paſs away*, yet *his words* ſhall not paſs away. *The earth and the heavens may periſh, they all may wax old as doth a garment, and as a veſture they may be changed*, but His words ſhall never fail. Truth is ſecurely eſtabliſhed on a firm and everlaſting foundation, and

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will continue invariably the ſame, however differently we may think proper to argue and determine about it. If therefore it be already ordained by *Him*, with whom is no *variableneſs, neither ſhadow of turning*, that all who have been called to the knowledge of Chriſt, ſhall be judged according to the covenant which He hath made with them, it will be but to little purpoſe for them to think of juſtifying themſelves on terms of their own preſcribing. Did the nature and conſequence of every action depend upon our own opinion of it, we ſhould do well to think lighly of our offences: could the penalties of diſobedience be removed with the apprehenſions of guilt, it would be worth the infidels while to argue himſelf into a perſuaſion

ſion of his innocence: But alas! our imaginations can have no influence over the eſtabliſhed laws of Him, who is the *ſame yeſterday, to day, and for ever*; they cannot enlarge the determined bounds of his mercy, nor alter the ſettled conditions of our ſalvation. Depend upon it, the immutability of God is not to be over-ruled by the obſtinacy of man. Infinite power, wiſdom, and goodneſs, will never be prevailed upon to reverſe the eſtabliſhed order of things, on purpoſe only to pacify the rebellious murmurs of weakneſs, ignorance, and wickedneſs. But ſo it is, the infidel is reſolved that he will not be ſaved at all, unleſs he can be ſaved in his own way. He not only adopts, but perſeveres in the abſurd reaſoning of

Naaman

Naaman the Syrian, who, when *Eliſha* had told him, that in order to get rid of his leproſy, it was neceſſary he ſhould waſh in *Jordan*, inſtead of obeying the directions of the prophet, began to enter into this abſurd expoſtulation; *Are not Abana and Parphar rivers of Damaſcus, better than all the waters of Iſrael? may I not waſh in them, and be clean?* Are not my own good works, ſays the infidel, of much more conſequence than the foreign righteouſneſs of another, may I not confide in them, and be ſaved? But where is the ſenſe of this queſtion, if He who *alone hath power both to ſave and deſtroy*, hath declared to the contrary? The goſpel, it is certain, hath determined it otherwiſe; and if that does not contain the purpoſe of God,

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you will in vain ſearch for it any where elſe: if your recovery is not conſulted there, your caſe is deſperate, your diſeaſe is abſolutely without remedy.

But, perhaps, after all, you will not allow that you have ſuch a diſeaſed and corrupted nature as need alarm you with the leaſt apprehenſion of danger; perhaps you may think yourſelf ſufficiently ſecure already in the integrity of your own righteouſneſs. Indeed, if your conſcience will but teſtify to this perſuaſion, you may ſafely perſiſt in your infidelity: there can be no occaſion for your paying the leaſt regard to the goſpel, as offering, to you at leaſt, a needleſs aſſiſtance. Chriſt himſelf will bear you out, and juſtify you in rejecting him; for He hath acknowledged, that *they that are whole need*

need not a phyſician; and it is his own expreſs declaration, that he *came not to call the righteous, but ſinners only to repentance*. But then, if upon a careful examination of your heart, you find that you are not in a condition to challenge a trial from the juſtice of God, take heed that you do not raſhly forfeit all title to his mercy, by refuſing to plead guilty.

Conſider only that you are a ſinner, when you look into the goſpel, and you will no longer be at a loſs to account for any thing that you ſhall find there, unleſs it be the aſtoniſhing greatneſs of that love which hath provided an attonement for ſo much unworthineſs. But if you forget the nature of your own condition, 'tis no wonder that you cannot underſtand the motive

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of God's proceedings in the gracious work of your redemption. The hopeleſs wretchedneſs that would have attended your fallen ſtate, without any interceſſion from above, was the foundation of all this miracle of mercy: the *abundance* of your *ſin*, was the principle that gave riſe to this greater *abundance* of God's *grace:* had you been in no danger of periſhing, He had never decreed that his only ſon ſhould come into the world, and ſuffer death, on purpoſe to ſave you.—To conclude,

It hath been very juſtly obſerved, that an extraordinary revelation preſuppoſes a corruption of the ſoul, much in the ſame manner, as a medical preſcription implies a diſeaſe of the body. Where there is a perfect ſound-

neſs of health, there can be no occaſion for a remedy; where there is not, it is not cuſtomary for the patient, to inſiſt upon the phyſician's laying before him a ſatisfactory explanation of the nature and cauſe of his malady, and giving him a particular lecture on the intention of his bill, before he will venture to confide in the reaſonableneſs of his practice. But the infidel is not for allowing, that God Himſelf can have a ſufficient knowledge of his ſpiritual conſtitution, unleſs He ſhall vouchſafe to convince him of the expediency of thoſe means, which He hath preſcribed for its welfare. He can confide in the ſkill of almoſt any one, that will but attempt to preſerve the health of his body; but infinite wiſdom itſelf is not to be truſted with

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the preſervation of his ſoul. He is very ready to catch at any thing that is recommended to him, only as a probable expedient of lengthening out his exiſtence in this world, and yet, though the cup of eternal life be continually held out to him by the merciful hand of an infallible Saviour, He can ſtill thruſt it from him, and pretend that he neither can, nor ought, to ſwallow the precious draught, till he has a clear demonſtration, that there is no other poſſible way of ſecuring a happy immortality. But ſurely every one, that can either think, or reaſon at all, muſt be ſtruck with the extreme folly, and deſperate obſtinacy of ſuch a behaviour; and perceive that he is under every obligation, in point of wiſdom, as well as duty, to

confide in the revealed terms of his ſalvation, and thankfully to accept the goſpel of Chriſt, with this ſingle caution alone, that he does not fruſtrate, by the neglect of any requiſite preparation on his part, the intended efficacy of its moſt gracious offers.

PART

DISCOURSE IV.

PART II.

HAVING laid open the two principal ſources of infidelity, and given a general illuſtration of its extreme folly and danger; I ſhall now proceed, as I propoſed, in the ſecond place,

II. To point out the characters, and expoſe the miſchievous effects of enthuſiaſm.

The characters of enthuſiaſm have been much the ſame in all ages and

nations. The ſimilitude between the old popiſh legends and the journals of our modern methodiſts, has already been ſet forth in ſuch a convincing and ſatisfactory manner, as cannot fail of rendering the latter altogether as contemptible as the former, in the eſtimation of every ſenſible and unprejudiced perſon*. The illuſtration however of this ſimilitude ſeems to have had but very little effect on the methodiſts themſelves; nor ought this, indeed, to be conſidered as any matter of wonder; for what but invincible obſtinacy, can be expected from a ſet of men, who have laid it down, as a ſaving article of their faith, that no oppoſition can be raiſed againſt them,

* See "The Enthuſiaſm of the Methodiſts and "Papiſts compared."

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but by the inſtigation of the devil; "*Well*, ſay they, may the devil be "ſo buſy in ſetting all his agents to "work, when we have brought his "kingdom into ſo much danger." But however difficult it may be to reclaim thoſe who are already ſet out upon this ſpiritual kind of knight-errantry; yet I would by no means ſuppoſe it neceſſary for me to ſet forth half their abſurdities, in order to diſcourage any that are not as yet infatuated by it, from adding to their numbers. Not to enter therefore into any needleſs reflections upon the more amazing extravagancies of their character, ſuch as their profane application of the ſcripture titles and deſcriptions of our Saviour, and his apoſtles, to themſelves; their pretenſions to a

gift of propheſy, to a power of working miracles, and to an authority over devils, who, according to their own accounts, have poſſeſſed and been caſt out from a great multitude of their followers;* not to enter, I ſay, into any needleſs reflections upon ſuch groſs inſtances, either of their knavery, or their madneſs; I ſhall content myſelf with ſhowing what little authority they have from ſcripture, for repreſenting all the precepts of morality and reaſon, as antichriſtian principles. My motives for entering into a conſideration of theſe two particular tenets, rather than any other of their doctrines, are theſe; firſt, becauſe theſe two ſeem to be univerſally received by the

* See their Journals.

whole

whole mixt fraternity of methodiſts, whether in the church, or out of it: and, ſecondly, becauſe they are evidently calculated to lay open a boundleſs ſcope for the excurſions of folly, and to encourage wickedneſs to run the greateſt lengths by removing every obſtruction that would be moſt likely to reſtrain its progreſs: for what dependence, what ſafe and well-grounded dependence, can be placed, either on the wiſe, or good conduct of thoſe, who have laid themſelves under a religious obligation to deſpiſe all the precepts of morality and reaſon? But to bring theſe tenets to the teſt of ſcripture.

Becauſe ſome men have reſolved the whole of religion into a good moral life, in ſuch an exceptionable manner,

as to exclude every obligation ariſing from the poſitive precepts of chriſtianity, therefore the good moral man is reviled by our modern enthuſiaſts, as the very worſt of ſinners, notwithſtanding the goſpel doth abundantly teſtify that our Saviour came into the world on purpoſe to make him ſo; notwithſtanding He hath aſſured us, over and over again, that a good moral life is the principal duty of every man, conſidered merely as a chriſtian, and the only certain mark of his true diſciples.

So likewiſe, becauſe ſome men have attempted to juſtify their infidelity on principles of reaſon; therefore reaſon itſelf is exclaimed againſt by our modern enthuſiaſts, as the cauſe of infidelity; and yet we find that the chriſtian

tian religion is repreſented unto us as a moſt reaſonable ſervice; that it requires we ſhould be able to *give a reaſon for the hope that is in us*; and has recommended the example of the *Bereans*, as particularly worthy of our imitation, *becauſe they examined whether theſe things were ſo, or not.* So true is it that theſe people either cannot diſcern, or will not allow any difference between the moſt oppoſite things in nature: between a conſciencious practice of virtue for the ſake of its own eſſential and indiſpenſable obligations, and ſuch an arrogant pretenſion to a ſelf-ſufficiency of merit, upon the account of what we do, as if the mere bounden *duty* of *unprofitable ſervants*, could, of itſelf, confer a juſt claim to an *eternal reward*: between the *pride of ſcience*, falſely

falſely ſo called, and that ſober, candid, and modeſt inquiſitiveneſs, which can alone conduct us to the ſure diſcovery of truth; or that *carnal knowledge, which is at enmity with God*, and that ſincere love of wiſdom, without which it is impoſſible for us to become *wiſe unto ſalvation*.

Nor are the effects of enthuſiaſm leſs miſchievous than the principles of it are irrational. When the methodiſt teachers talk ſo much of the fluctuating ſtate of their own minds and conſciences: when they repreſent themſelves as perpetually ſubject to alternate fits of ardour and indifference, faith and infidelity, aſſurance and deſpair; one minute depreſſed, as it were, to the very bottom of hell, by an overwhelming weight of temptation;

tion; the next exalted, in all the triumph of conqueſt, above the third Heaven: now obliged to undergo the ſevereſt conflicts with the devil; by and by, impreſſed with freſh aſſurances of their ſalvation, viſited by the holy ſpirit, engaged in familiar converſation with Chriſt, and favoured with the ſpecial preſence of God:* when the methodiſt teachers, I ſay, are continually harangueing on theſe, or ſome other reveries of the like enthuſiaſtic nature; how can it be expected, but that the greateſt part of their followers ſhould be too much diſtracted, to experience any thing of that true peace and tranquillity of mind, which can ariſe only from a compoſed, uniform,

* See their Journals.

and

and rational principle of piety? And 'tis much if a great many of them be not ſo far infatuated, as to aſcribe every accidental change of bodily habit, to the agency of ſome ſupernatural cauſe; to miſtake the dejecting influence of a ſplenetick fit, for ſome dreadful temptation of the devil, and the natural workings of a briſker flow of ſpirits, for the inſpiration of the Holy Ghoſt.

It is probable enough, that ſome of theſe teachers may be very powerfully endowed with a certain canting ſpecies of eloquence, which is apt to make an affecting impreſſion upon weak minds; and this, though they ſhould never offer to addreſs their diſcourſe to the underſtanding, may nevertheleſs, by alarming the paſſions, not unfrequently

ly excite a principle of penitence even in the moſt abandoned and profligate of their hearers. But then, ſuch is their doctrine, and yet they would have you believe they are the only true preachers of *Jeſus Chriſt*, that neither the publick, nor the penitents themſelves, are likely to receive the leaſt benefit from their reformation. They may indeed be converted; but how? why, only from wickedneſs to madneſs. They may, perhaps, get rid of their accuſtomed ſins; but then it will be with the loſs of their ſenſes too: and truely, it muſt be confeſſed, this is one way of working a thorough change in ſinners, a way of making them *new creatures* indeed. There is no doubt but a melancholy deſponding mind, or any other ſpiritual ailment,

ment, may bring a ſinner moſt effectually to forſake his former evil courſes; but what will that avail him, if it drives him into other courſes, that ſhall be no leſs irregular, and perhaps much more extenſively miſchievous in their conſequences; if it diſqualifies him from following his proper occupation, and renders him uſeleſs in every civil, and domeſtick capacity? this, I believe, is well known to be no uncommon caſe; and a very deplorable caſe it is: and yet, if this is not the only, nor indeed the worſt accuſation, that can be brought againſt theſe enthuſiaſts; for what is all this, however ſhocking it may juſtly be thought, to that foul diſgrace which they caſt on the honour of God, and the glory of the goſpel? Nothing being

ing more certain, than that whoever attempts to diſcredit the uſe of reaſon, does, in effect, endeavour to ſubvert the fundamental ſupport of the chriſtian religion, and, as much as in him lies, to caſt a reproach upon his maker, the adorable author and diſpenſer of both. That the truth of this may further appear, I ſhall add a few obſervations, as I propoſed in the laſt place.

III. To prove that all true religion muſt be the reſult of a modeſt, diligent, and ſincere employment of our rational faculties.

Reaſon is the neceſſary and eſſential ſupport of all true religion; and ſincerity is the very ſoul of all real piety and goodneſs. Theſe ſhall be laid down, for the preſent, as undeniable

maxims; and ſuch indeed they are: but ſtill 'tis no leſs undeniable, that all the adverſaries of chriſtianity have conſtantly endeavoured to juſtify their oppoſition, either on the principle of reaſon, or the motive of ſincerity. Hence ariſes a difficulty; and hence it is that ſome, whoſe zeal exceeds their *knowledge*, have been ſo forward to exclaim againſt the dictates of reaſon, as nothing better than the leſſons of the devil, and to inveigh againſt ſincerity, as a latitudinarian pretence only for all manner of diſſention; a ſtrong hold for the refuge of hereticks; an impenetrable ſhield for the protection of infidels. But are we then to reject the *words of knowledge* as uſeleſs, only becauſe we may be led into the moſt fatal errors by an abuſive ap-

plica-

plication of them? If to lay out the talent improperly, or if to hide it in a napkin, be wrong; ſurely, to throw it away entirely muſt be much worſe. What room can we have to expect any extraordinary aſſiſtance from God, if we ſlight and depretiate the very beſt gift, which his ordinary bounty hath beſtowed upon us? To think that He will ſend us ſome better guide, if we refuſe to follow that of our reaſon, is only to tempt his grace; to tempt it, juſt in the ſame manner, as we are ſaid to tempt his providence, when through a preſumptuous reliance on his ſupernatural aſſiſtance, we neglect to do what we are naturally enabled to perform for ourſelves. As the providence of God befriends thoſe moſt, who, whilſt they humbly con-

ſide in his readineſs to help the inſufficiency of their own endeavours, employ their beſt abilities to advance their temporal intereſts; ſo the ſuccours of his grace will undoubtedly be moſt largely imparted to thoſe, who, with a like humble confidence, are moſt diligent in exerting all the powers of their reaſon to promote their everlaſting welfare. And then, as to the objection againſt ſincerity, why muſt that be diſparaged, only becauſe the moſt diſingenuous and ill-deſigning men may ſometimes pretend to be governed by it? At this rate, it would be right to accuſe virtue, as the cauſe of hypocriſy; or to charge our ruin on the means of our happineſs. Nay, if every thing was to be bad in the ſame degree that it is moſt liable

liable to be abuſed, then would Chriſtianity itſelf be the very worſt thing in the world, and we ſhould do well to get rid of it as faſt as we can. But the truth of the caſe is this: If a man ſearches the ſcriptures to gratify an idle curioſity, to detect ſpeculative difficulties, or, indeed, with any other diſpoſition and intent than to be convinced of its truth, and ſatisfied about his duty, he is almoſt ſure to become an infidel; but then this will happen, not becauſe he is rational, and ſincere, but becauſe he is quite the reverſe. His conduct, in this caſe, is evidently wrong, is evidently criminal; nor are we to wonder, if God ſhould not only forbear to favour him with any freſh aſſiſtance, but, as a judicial puniſhment for the abuſe of his former

bounty, deprive him even of that *which he had*, of the benefit of that *original talent* which was at firſt entruſted to his management, and ſuffer him to be more deluded, by the very *light* of that knowledge he hath, than he could have been, even by the *darkneſs* of ignorance itſelf. But when a man is honeſtly reſolved to be governed by his reaſon, and ſearches the ſcriptures with an earneſt deſire to diſcover the will of God, and a full intent to live up to all that he can diſcover of it, he is altogether as ſure to become a thorough good chriſtian. The very temper and diſpoſition of ſuch a man is, of itſelf, ſufficient to recommend him to the favour of God. What St. *Paul* ſays of alms-giving, is altogether as applicable in this caſe;

If there be firſt a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not. He that has a hearty and thorough inclination to diſcover and obey the will of God, is not *far from his kingdom.* He that *ſeeks the Lord ſhall underſtand all things*, that is, all things neceſſary for his ſalvation, for *He is ever with them that fear Him, and will ſhow them his covenant.* Beſides, if no ſecurity againſt any fatal error was to be expected, in this caſe, from the ſpecial influence of God's preventing grace; yet it would ſtill be very abſurd, to ſuppoſe that a man's reaſon and ſincerity ſhould either leave him in a wavering ſcepticiſm about the truth of Chriſtianity, or under a perſuaſion that it is falſe. It muſt be ſomething very

different from reaſon, that can recommend, or juſtify a ſtate of ſuſpenſe, in a matter of ſuch infinite importance; for there can be no other rational conſequence of a man's being barely uncertain, in ſuch a caſe as this, than a ready and fixed determination to be influenced by the motives of belief on the ſafer ſide. And no one, who allows the truth of Chriſtianity, can ſuppoſe, with any poſſible conſiſtency, that it ſhould want a ſufficient degree of evidence to convince a rational and ſincere inquirer; ſince to ſuppoſe that the goſpel may be revealed in vain to ſuch a perſon, is the very ſame thing as to ſuppoſe it no revelation at all. And as it is clear, that no good reaſon can be aſſigned, why this laſt ſuppoſition ſhould be taken

taken for granted; it will follow, of courſe, that it is abſolutely impoſſible for a man to become an infidel, on any rational motive whatſoever, unleſs he can clearly demonſtrate that Chriſtianity muſt be falſe.

And now, 'tis to be hoped, it appears ſufficiently evident, that a ſober, unprejudiced, and teachable temper, has not only a natural tendency to make us truely good and pious, but is, moreover, that evangelical diſpoſition, which God hath promiſed to bleſs with a continued extraordinary ſupply of his gracious aſſiſtance. It is a temper of mind, that will not only diſpoſe us to ſearch for conviction, but to pray for it too. If, after our moſt honeſt and diligent inquiries, we want more

knowledge, this will make us ready to *aſk it of Him who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not.* If, after we have believed as much and as firmly as we are able, we are ſtill unſatisfied with the meaſure and ſtrength of our faith; this will prompt us to join in ſupplication with the father in the goſpel, and pray unto God to *help our unbelief.* On this, therefore, as on the moſt ſolid foundation, may we ſafely build our hopes of happineſs; on this, as on the true rock of Chriſt, may we reſt our ſouls, with the utmoſt confidence that it will never fail us. For if we can ſafely depend on any thing at all, we may be well aſſured that the ſame rational ſincerity, which made *Nathanael* ſo willing to come and ſee *our Saviour*, upon the firſt call,

and,

and, after conviction, ſo ready to acknowledge Him to be the *Son of God*, will either, of itſelf, bring us alſo to diſcover, and confeſs the truth of his goſpel; or that the ſame God, who found out means to inſtruct the unblameable ignorance of *Cornelius*, and the *Ethiopian Eunuch*, will take care to communicate every thing to us alſo, that ſhall be neceſſary for our ſalvation, if we, like them, are not wanting in a hearty inclination and earneſt endeavour to *work it out for ourſelves.*

DIS-

DISCOURSE V.

1 TIMOTHY iii. 16.

Without controverſy, great is the Myſtery of Godlineſs.

WHATEVER may, in fact, be the real motives to infidelity, yet it is obſervable, that the myſteries of Chriſtianity have, for the moſt part, been the only one pretended. And, indeed, it is no wonder that a profeſſed Deiſt, ſhould be more apt to attempt a vindication of himſelf, by diſputing the credibility of thoſe doctrines

trines which the goſpel inculcates, as neceſſary articles of faith, than by calling in queſtion the unexceptionableneſs of thoſe precepts which it lays down, as indiſpenſable rules of conduct: For it is not ſo much in the power of others, to judge how far he is capable of reconciling his reaſon to that which it requires him to believe, as it is for them to ſee he cannot poſſibly find any difficulty in reconciling his conſcience to that which it enjoins him to put in practice. There are few infidels but will readily allow, that the goſpel contains an excellent ſyſtem of morals; but then they have no notion of paying any regard to thoſe inſtructions, which are more peculiar to it, as an extraordinary revelation: They are willing enough to acknow-

acknowledge the authority of Chriſt, juſt in the ſame way, as they would that of Socrates, or any other teacher of righteouſneſs, but cannot perſuade themſelves to think, that their eternal welfare muſt neceſſarily depend on their obedience to Him, as their Lord, and their faith in Him, as their only poſſible Saviour: No, as to the Divinity, and mediatorial office of Chriſt, theſe are points which are allowed, on all hands, to be inſcrutable myſteries, and myſteries are things, which they can by no means prevail on themſelves to ſwallow; they know nothing of them, or nothing more, at leaſt, than that they are much too hard for their faith to digeſt.

One would imagine theſe men thought there was ſomething, even in

in the very name of a myſtery, that was ſufficient, of itſelf, to diſcredit any thing that went under that denomination: It is a myſtery, they ſay, and as ſuch, we freely give it up to weak, or deſigning men, to believe, or pretend to believe it, as they pleaſe; as if this was argument enough to explode the credulity and hypocriſy of others, and to juſtify their own want of faith: Whereas it is certain, that a truth of a myſterious kind, may be made as intelligible, with regard to the terms of the propoſition that contains it, as the moſt obvious and familiar truth that can poſſibly be thought of; and it is no leſs certain, that all that is generally meant by a myſtery, in the goſpel, is a clear and particular declaration of ſomething abſolutely undiſ-

undiſcoverable, but by the means of an extraordinary revelation, and, upon that very account, of ſo ſublime a nature, that it cannot be thoroughly comprehended by us, even after it is ſo expreſsly revealed. And I ſhall obſerve here, once for all, that I have no deſign of vindicating the credibility of myſteries in the following diſcourſe, under any other acceptation than that which I have juſt ſpecified, and which is all that the apoſtle can be ſuppoſed to mean in the text, as appears by that enumeration of inſtances, which he has ſubjoined to it. As for thoſe paſſages of ſcripture, though ſuch are very rarely to be met with, which are of obſcure and doubtful interpretation, they will not properly fall under my preſent conſideration, as being,

of

of courſe, no eſſential articles of faith; and much leſs, therefore, will thoſe doctrines, which ſome men have inculcated, as the doctrines of Chriſtianity, without having the leaſt warrant for it from the ſcriptures; doctrines that differ as widely from ſuch as are only myſterious, as what is incomprehenſible to our underſtandings, through the diſproportionate greatneſs of the ſubject, differs from that which is abſolutely unintelligible, upon account of its plain abſurdity and nonſenſe.

But though moſt of the objections that have been urged againſt the myſteries of the goſpel, are calculated rather to raiſe a general prejudice againſt them, upon account of the name, than to diſcredit the matter they contain; yet as ſome few have at-

attempted, in a more particular and argumentative way, to demonſtrate the abſurdity of believing them; and as they have been commonly attacked by infidels, under a notion that they could not be ſo eaſily defended, as any of the external evidences for the truth of Chriſtianity; it is the more incumbent on ſuch as are *accounted ſtewards of the myſteries of God*, to endeavour to evince the contrary: This, therefore, I ſhall attempt to do in the following diſcourſe; and as the apoſtle has acknowledged in the text, that *without controverſy great is the myſtery of godlineſs*, ſo, I truſt, I ſhall be able to prove, that nothing can be more credible than that it ſhould be ſo.—In order to this, I ſhall in the firſt place,

I. Produce ſuch objections againſt the credibility of myſteries, conſidered as articles of a divine revelation, as a profeſſed deiſt may be thought moſt likely to urge.—And ſecondly,

II. I ſhall undertake to give a full and ſatisfactory anſwer to them, not by entering into any particular examination of the objections themſelves, but by ſuch a general illuſtration of the ſubject, as may be ſufficient to demonſtrate that all objections, in this caſe, muſt be equally vain and inconcluſive.

I. Now as theſe objections are to be ſuch, as a profeſſed deiſt would be moſt likely to urge, it will be requiſite, in point of propriety, to make them appear as much in character as I can, both with regard to the manner, as well

well as the matter of them. This however is ſuch an article of propriety, as I ſhould rather be more ſcrupulous to decline, than to obſerve, had I not a view of inculcating a moſt ſeaſonable caution, and a moſt uſeful reflection to a greater advantage, by producing a ſpecimen of this ſort.

Let a deiſt then be ſuppoſed, in the firſt place to maintain that a divine revelation, with myſteries in it, is utterly irreconcilable with our ideas of the wiſdom, goodneſs, and juſtice of God; and thus to argue, in ſupport of his aſſertion.

How can we ſuppoſe that God ſhould act ſo contrary to the cleareſt principles of wiſdom, as to communicate to mankind, and that too profeſſedly for the ſake of their informa-

tion, ſuch a dark and obſcure account of his proceedings with them, as can anſwer no other purpoſe, ſo far as they can diſcover, but to puzzle their apprehenſions, deſtroy the uſe of their underſtandings, and render all the rational principles of knowledge uncertain, vain, and uſeleſs; no other purpoſe, but to try them with the neceſſary alternative of rejecting their reaſon, as a falſe and erroneous guide, or imputing a religion, ſo repugnant to it, to the pretended inſpiration of a crafty and deſigning heart, or the deluſive reveries of an enthuſiaſtick brain; in ſhort, no other purpoſe, but to make them doubt of every thing, or nothing; to introduce a general ſcepticiſm, or boundleſs credulity?

And

And is it not altogether as abſurd, to ſuppoſe that a being of infinite goodneſs, ſhould promulge any thing that was expedient for us to be acquainted with, and He could not think of promulging any thing that was not ſo, that He ſhould promulge it, I ſay, in ſuch an obſcure manner, as muſt make it appear rather deſigned, to inſult us with a ſuperabundant proof of our natural ignorance, than to enlarge the ordinary extent of our underſtandings, and give us more adequate conceptions of his divine nature and providence? For what is a revelation of myſteries, to deſcribe it under ſome properly obſcure metaphor, but a ſort of cloudy veil, ſuperinduced over one knows not what, which ſerves however to indicate the concealment

of ſomething, and makes us attentive to, and deplore, a defect of ſight, which we ſhould, otherwiſe, have been quite unconſcious of?

Nor is it leſs inconſiſtent with our only, and therefore right ideas of juſtice, to ſuppoſe that God ſhould require us to believe, nay more, that He ſhould place the neceſſary conditions of our eternal welfare in the belief of any thing, whoſe meaning we are unable to diſcover: for this is to repreſent the infinitely righteous Lord of the univerſe, as commanding obedience from his ſubject creatures, on the ſevereſt penalties, without putting it in their power to attain the *ſaving knowledge* of his laws; a method of government, not only unworthy of the divine legiſlature, but far more op-

oppreſſive than the moſt arbitrary proceedings of human tyranny.

The obvious inconſiſtency of myſterious doctrines with the only conceivable uſe of an extraordinary revelation, may be urged alſo, as a further demonſtration of the impoſſibility of their coming from God. For what inſtruction, or advantage, can be derived from a ſet of doctrines, in which we can neither diſcover any uſeful deſign, nor collect any ſignificant information? God might as well be ſuppoſed to ſpeak to us in an unknown language, or of ſuch things as are abſolutely unintelligible, as to deliver real truths of ſuch a ſort, or in ſuch a manner, as cannot be comprehended by us: For whatever difference there

may be in the caſes themſelves, yet would they, nevertheleſs, be juſt the ſame, as to their relative importance; ſince they would both, with reſpect to us, be equally inſignificant and uſeleſs. It cannot be allowed therefore, that there are even difficulties, in any part of the Chriſtian religion, without reflecting ſome diſcredit on the whole; but to maintain there are myſteries in it, is, in effect, quite to deſtroy all its authority, and to fruſtrate every pretenſion, it might otherwiſe make, to a divine original.

And laſtly, it may be objected againſt the credibility of myſteries, that they are ſo abſolutely repugnant to the cleareſt dictates of reaſon, that they cannot poſſibly admit of an entire and unfeigned aſſent, from the think-

thinking part of mankind. It has been very juſtly obſerved, that nothing can be communicated to us, even by an immediate and perſonal revelation, with ſuch a degree of certainty, as ſhall exceed the infallibility of our natural faculties; ſince the evidence of its coming from God, muſt depend entirely on the authority of their report. Is it not therefore abſolutely incredible, that God himſelf ſhould attempt to make us diſregard that original declaration of his will, in the voice of reaſon, by laying us under any ſecondary injunction not to hearken to it? Can we ſuppoſe that He ſhould, at firſt, implant in us ſuch a faculty, as muſt unavoidably convince us, that it was ordained by Him to regulate our aſſent in all caſes what-

whatſoever, and yet afterwards, ſhould require us, without making any innovations in our nature, to diſtruſt its dictates, and renounce its authority? Or, to expreſs the ſame thing in other words, can we ſuppoſe, that He ſhould eſtabliſh in the world, two ſtanding revelations of his will, an internal, and an external one, and that He ſhould give us ſuch a rule for the conduct of our lives and underſtandings, in the former, as is quite incompatible with the preſcribed meaſure of duty in the latter; and ſet up the ſtandard of faith in direct oppoſition to that of knowledge? *'Tis clear therefore, clear beyond all controverſy, that there can be no great myſtery in godlineſs.*

Such are the objections which a profeſſed infidel may be ſuppoſed to urge

urge againſt the credibility of myſteries, conſidered as articles of a divine revelation: and I have deſignedly given into the free and plauſible manner of our infidel writers, as well as I could, in order to produce a proper ſpecimen of their ſophiſtical ingenuity, that I may, thereby, more effectually apprize the inconſiderate and prejudiced of its deceitful influence, and prevent their being ſeduced into any fatal errors, by the triumphant deciſions of argumentative impertinence, under the pompous title, and ſpecious appearance of demonſtration. Precautions of this ſort cannot but be of general expediency, in an age ſo productive of bold and expert champions for the cauſe of infidelity: for though there can be no danger of their gaining

ing any proſelytes amongſt ſuch, whoſe approbation can ſtamp any true and laſting credit on themſelves, or their productions; yet it is to be feared that many, who are weak enough to be influenced by the logick of a florid ſtyle, the evidence of wit, and the conviction of ridicule, may be eaſily drawn over to their party, by an artful management of thoſe inſtruments of deceit.

But here one cannot help reflecting, with horror, on the abuſive application which theſe men make of their reaſon; for nothing ſurely can exceed the folly, the ingratitude, and the guilt of thoſe, who make no other uſe of the talents which they receive from Heaven, than to oppoſe the gracious purpoſe of God in beſtowing them.

them. And yet there are many, who appear to be even ambitious of ſignalizing themſelves upon this account; as if they thought they were giving an inconteſtable proof of their being poſſeſſed of an extraordinary ſhare of knowledge, by their very manner of abuſing that little which they have; as if every remove from religion, was a ſure indication of ſome further advancement towards true philoſophy, and downright infidelity the moſt infallible token of a ſuperior genius, and an extraordinary compaſs of underſtanding. But a diſbelief of Chriſtianity, is really ſo far from being the natural conſequence of much knowledge, that every advancement in knowledge has a direct tendency to bring a man to a fuller diſcovery of

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its truth, and to give him a ſtronger conviction of its importance. Every learned man, if he be but as good and humble as he is learned, is in a manner convinced, from his own experience, that infidelity muſt always proceed from ſome cauſe that is quite independent of learning: and where it cannot be attributed, either to vice, or ignorance, it can only be conſidered as the offspring of pride. An affectation to be diſtinguiſhed, even by ſuch ſingularities, as are extremely diſgraceful in themſelves, is no uncommon thing. Where there is vanity, it will be ſure to ſhow itſelf, ſome way or another: and if the corruption of the age be ſo great, as to place its admiration on ſuch characters, as ought rather to be the objects of abhorrence,

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than ambition; 'tis no wonder if ſome vain men ſhould pretend to be greater infidels, and others greater rakes, than they really are. It can hardly be ſuppoſed, indeed, that they who would be thought great debauchees, ſhould ever diſcredit their pretenſions, by any exemplary innocence and regularity of life; but it is very poſſible, that ſome profeſſed infidels may go a great way towards invalidating their own teſtimony of themſelves, by their very manner of vindicating their cauſe: For the moſt ſenſible arguments that can be urged in defence of infidelity, may be juſtly conſidered, as the moſt convincing proofs of a contrary perſuaſion, in thoſe that urge them. And it muſt be acknowledged that ſome of our infidel writers have made ſuch a

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diſplay of their abilities, that, when we conſider the nature of their undertaking, we can hardly avoid ſuſpecting their ſincerity, and that they muſt needs have argued againſt their own ſecret convictions: They may be ſaid to refute themſelves, even by that very ingenuity which they employ in their own defence; it being abſurd to ſuppoſe, that they, who can ſhow ſo much good ſenſe, in maintaining the moſt irrational and groundleſs notions, ſhould, at the ſame time, be really ſo ignorant as not to know that truth and reaſon are againſt them. As theſe men, who can thus oppoſe the moſt intereſting and important perſuaſions of mankind, on a ſedate principle of vanity, will of courſe be much leſs mortified, by having the integrity

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of their hearts called in queſtion, than the ſoundneſs of their hands, it is not improbable but they will be better pleaſed even with ſo partial a compliment as this, than with none at all. And yet, ſurely, it would have been far better for them to have remained undiſtinguiſhed for their abilities, than to be ſignalized only by ſo glaring an abuſe of them; far better for them, to have been born without any ambition, or any reaſon at all, than to aſpire after renown, by ſuch an extraordinary proſtitution of the very beſt gift which infinite goodneſs can beſtow, as ſhall make it ſerve only to expoſe themſelves, and their fellow-creatures, to the greater danger of everlaſting ruin.

Having premiſed this ſeaſonable caution, and this uſeful reflection, I ſhould now, according to my propoſal, go on to conſider the objections which introduced them: But as the importance of the ſubject, requires that I ſhould be as full and ſatisfactory in my anſwer to theſe objections as poſſible; and as I would not weaken its force by any diviſion, I ſhall reſerve it for the entire ſubject of a ſecond part; and ſhall only add, for the preſent, a few ſuch general remarks on the nature of theſe objections, as will be ſufficient to prevent any prejudice in their favour, and likewiſe to prepare your minds with a ſuitable diſpoſition to receive all that conviction, which I hope to give in the enſuing anſwer.

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I would obſerve then, as to the objections, that however ſpecious they may appear, at firſt ſight, yet, upon a cloſer examination, it will be found, that they contain nothing, but what is either groundleſs in itſelf, or quite foreign to the purpoſe: For if it can be proved, that we are no further ignorant of any thing contained in the goſpel, than as it is either abſolutely neceſſary, or, in ſome reſpect or another, expedient for us that we ſhould be; it will clearly follow, that, whatever myſteries there may be in Chriſtian Godlineſs, they cannot be inconſiſtent either with the moral attributes of God, or the end of an extraordinary revelation; and in conſequence of that, it will follow likewiſe that they cannot, in any reſpect, be at all

repugnant to a rational faith. Now this I ſhall undertake to prove, and that too, as the nature of the caſe requires, without entering into any conſideration of that poſitive evidence, which would, however, be ſufficient to confirm the divine original of the goſpel, even though it were impoſſible to give any ſatisfactory anſwer to theſe objections. It muſt be owned, indeed, that it is no further incumbent on us, to engage in the defence of Chriſtianity, againſt ſuch attacks as theſe, than the reſtleſs ſpirit of its inſolent adverſaries have made it: The main fortreſs would be equally ſecure, whether this poſt were ſurrendered to them, or not: But as it is in our power to defeat them, even on this their choſen ſpot, and with their own favou-

favourite weapons, there can be no reaſon why we ſhould decline the combat; and eſpecially as the ſuffering them to remain in a free and quiet poſſeſſion of ſo inconſiderable a part, would make them glory as much, as if they had gained a complete victory over the whole. Even the internal proofs of the truth of Chriſtianity are, of themſelves, more than ſufficient to overcome the force of any ſpeculative arguments, that can be drawn from the conſideration of its difficulties: And as to its external proofs, thoſe grand outworks of our religion, they are much too ſolid and impregnable, to receive the leaſt impreſſion from any aſſault that can be made upon them, by the feeble ſubtileties of metaphyſical reaſoning: They preſent

themſelves, as matters of fact, and, as ſuch, can only be invalidated by the oppoſition of hiſtorical teſtimony, and the repugnancy of other events, whoſe reality may be confirmed by as ſtrong, or ſuperior authority.

DISCOURSE VI.

PART II.

AS a fundamental exception to the firſt of the foregoing objections, it is to be obſerved, that we ought, in all our inquiries relating to the moral and religious eſtabliſhments of God, to conſider them, juſt in the ſame light, as we do the laws of nature, in mere phyſical reſearches; that is, we ought to conſider both, as abſolutely requiſite for the ſupport, the welfare, and the harmony of the uni-

verſe, notwithſtanding our caſuiſtry cannot always explain the expediency of the firſt ſort, nor our philoſophy always demonſtrate the propriety of the latter. It is reckoned enough for the intereſts of natural religion, that we can diſcover clear notices of the Deity, in ſome parts only of the viſible creation. We are ſtrictly obliged by the dictates of right reaſon, after we have once traced out the plain foot-ſteps of infinite wiſdom, goodneſs, and juſtice, in any one inſtance of an over-ruling providence, to extend our inferences beyond our actual knowledge, and conclude, from analogy, that all other adminiſtrations, where the ſame proofs are not equally manifeſt, are however, in themſelves, equally wiſe, beneficial, and juſt; and that they

they would, likewiſe, appear ſo to us, were we not confined, in our obſervations, to ſo ſmall a portion of God's univerſal empire, but could extend them to every other part that has any connexion with it, and take a comprehenſive view of that one complete and perfect whole, to which they all belong.

Now this way of reaſoning muſt certainly be as concluſive, in favour of the goſpel revelation in particular, as it can be, when urged in the behalf of natural religion in general: For the characters of an Almighty hand are no leſs legible in the book of grace, than in the book of nature; and if we cannot but allow God to be the author of the latter, notwithſtanding it abounds with ſo many paſ-

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ſages above the explication of human learning; what pretence can we have for denying Him to be the author of the former, merely upon account of its being perplexed with ſome few ſimilar difficulties? Or if we compare the power of that word, by which our Saviour wrought his miracles, with the power of that word, by which the Heavens and the earth were made; and place the wonderful work of our creation over againſt that of our redemption; in what reſpect will the articles of a Chriſtian's faith appear more myſterious, than the acknowledged Creed of the Deiſt himſelf? Since difficulties therefore, ſuch difficulties, I mean, as ariſe from the unnatural imperfection of our capacities, are common to all the works of God,

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who is Himſelf, at once the fountain, and the greateſt object of all our wonder, it muſt, of courſe, be as abſurd to deny the truth or expediency of the goſpel diſpenſation, becauſe we cannot thoroughly comprehend the whole of that myſterious ſcheme of mercy; as it would be to queſtion the divine eſtabliſhment of thoſe laws, by which the ordinary courſe of things is conducted, becauſe they are, in ſome reſpects, but ill accommodated to the idle ſuggeſtions of conceited ignorance. So that this mighty objection may be as juſtly urged againſt the ſettled conſtitution of nature, as againſt the doctrines of Chriſtianity; and yet which ever way it be urged, it is impoſſible that it ſhould amount, in fair concluſion,

ſion, to any thing more than this; " * that no divine appointment can " be wiſe, good, or juſt, unleſs we " can clearly perceive that it is ſo, " though we muſt own, at the ſame " time, that the nature of the caſe is " ſuch, as renders us incapable of " judging whether it be ſo or not, or " of ſeeing it to be ſo, though it cer- " tainly were."

Not that I would be underſtood to urge theſe conſiderations, as any direct and poſitive proof of the truth of Chriſtianity, but only in order to ſhow, that as we can have no reaſon to be ſurpriſed at thoſe difficulties with which it is attended, ſo would it be extremely abſurd to reject it, merely

* See Butler's Analogy, p. 311.

upon

upon account of ſuch difficulties, had we not ſo much reaſon to expect them. The proper evidences of the truth of Chriſtianity, are, at preſent, out of the queſtion; and I am engaged to defend it no further, than as 'tis objected to, upon account of mere ſpeculative difficulties: And ſo far, at leaſt, the foregoing conſiderations are ſufficiently concluſive: For if the beſt cultivated reaſon, aided by the moſt enlarged experience, cannot diſcover the final cauſes, even of ſome of thoſe events, whoſe realities are diſtinguiſhably evident and familiar, how abſurd would it be, to expect we ſhould be able to ſee more perfectly into the nature of ſuch recondite truths, whoſe bare exiſtence can only be collected from the ſpecial aſſurances of an

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extraordinary revelation; and if no ſuch thing can reaſonably be expected, upon ſuppoſition it is true, our finding it impoſſible to do it, can be no argument to prove it falſe. It muſt be owned indeed, that as no teſtimony of fact can be deſtroyed, ſo neither can the certainty of any thing be confirmed, by arguments that are drawn only from the general inſufficiency of our knowledge. The *things that are not ſeen*, muſt, after all, be left to reſt upon their own proper evidence, as well as the *things that are ſeen*: But if the reality of the latter is to be admitted, on the joint teſtimony of ſenſe and reaſon, notwithſtanding we may be very much in the dark, with regard to the nature, the manner, and the end of their exiſtence;

it will undeniably follow, that the former ought not to be denied, upon account of any ſimilar inſtances of our ignorance, if they alſo are ſupported by the ſtrongeſt evidence which they can poſſibly admit of. No difficulties, ariſing from the imperfection of our faculties, ought to be of any greater weight in the one caſe, than in the other: And if we did but conſider, that nothing but a total change of our nature, can remove that imperfection, we ſhould perceive, that when men make exceptions to the goſpel, upon account of its difficulties, they are, in fact, only finding fault with their own underſtandings, and may be rather ſaid, to quarrel with the conditions of their creation, than the terms of their redemption. But theſe perſons

ſons do not ſeem to know that a revealed truth can add to our knowledge no otherwiſe than as an experienced fact, and that no difference in the manner of our acquiring a ſatisfactory conviction of the certainty of different things, can make the leaſt alteration in the ſettled properties of the human underſtanding. If any thing be, in its own nature, above the adequate comprehenſion of our capacities, it can be of no conſequence by what means we are aſſured of its truth: Our intellectual powers will remain juſt the ſame, whether it be revealed to us from Heaven, or diſcovered by the unaſſiſted light of nature alone. However powerful the grace of God may be in changing our hearts, it is impoſſible that the bare reading of his

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word alone ſhould produce any ſuch effect on our underſtandings. As the principles from which we collect the infinity of ſpace and duration, cannot enable us to form any idea of the infinite extenſion of either; ſo neither can the evidences which convince us of the truth of the goſpel, ſupply us with any power of comprehending all thoſe myſteries of our redemption which are contained in it. Though our progreſs in knowledge be ſo indefinite, that we cannot preciſely determine where thoſe utmoſt boundaries are fixt, beyond which it is impoſſible for us to advance one ſtep further; yet are we no leſs certain that our knowledge muſt have its limitation, than that our life muſt have its period, though it be impoſſible for us to know the end

of either. Our ſouls can only receive a certain imperfect degree of illumination, whilſt we carry this veil of the fleſh about us: What new lights may break in upon us, after we have paſſed through the dark chambers of death, and left this covering behind us in the grave, is beyond our power to conceive: *It doth not yet appear what we ſhall be*; and as ſome degree of ignorance, in this reſpect, as will be ſhown hereafter, is undoubtedly fit and proper for probationary beings, ſo it ſeems to be abſolutely impoſſible that it ſhould be otherwiſe, whilſt we continue in the body. We do not find that St. *Paul*, when he was *caught up to the third Heaven*, obtained any thing more than an extraordinary conviction of the reality of that heavenly ſtate,

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to which he was for a while tranſlated: We do not find that what he ſaw or heard in the other world, was perceived with the intelligence of an angel, and it is certain that he returned only with the faculties and underſtanding of a man. Nay, ſo little reaſon have we to expect that any extraordinary addition to the natural ſtock of our knowledge ſhould remove its imperfection, that our daily experience is continually convincing us, that every ordinary acquiſition of this ſort, has a direct tendency to make us more ſenſible of it. That application and exerciſe of the underſtanding, which enables us to take a more comprehenſive view of God's power, wiſdom, and goodneſs in the works of the creation, ſerves alſo to give us a more

particular perception of our own weakneſs and ignorance. This is the principal advantage which the utmoſt height of true philoſophy can boaſt of, and a very eminent advantage indeed it is, if it does but beget in us ſuch a ſuitable degree of humility, as in reaſon it ought. The ſphere of our ignorance will be always enlarging itſelf in proportion to the extent of our diſcoveries. If we examine into our own frame and conſtitution, the more we diſcover, the more cauſe ſhall we find to acknowledge that we are *fearfully and wonderfully made*, and that there is ſomething within us, which, as it may for ever excite, ſo muſt it for ever fruſtrate our enquiries: If our curioſity prompts us to look abroad, the more we extend our views,

views, the more ſhall we ſee of thoſe things which are placed beyond the utmoſt reach of our comprehenſion. And as it is with natural knowledge, ſo is it likewiſe with divine; and 'tis no wonder if he who diſcovers moſt of that gracious diſpenſation of mercy to mankind, by Chriſt Jeſus, ſhould be the moſt ready to cry out, with St. *Paul*, *O the depth of the riches, both of the wiſdom and knowledge of God! how unſearchable are his judgments, and his ways paſt finding out.* In ſhort, the certainty of a fact, and a perfect knowledge about it, are two very different things: We may often feel the one breaking in upon our minds in an irreſiſtible manner, when we ſhall in vain endeavour to make room for the admiſſion of the other:

And, in general, that man muſt needs exempt himſelf from all right of being talked to as a reaſonable being, who can maintain, that his bare incapacity of forming an adequate idea of any thing, is, of itſelf, a ſufficient ground for denying, either its uſefulneſs, or reality.

As theſe conſiderations are abundantly ſufficient to ſhow that our ignorance, with regard to ſome points of ſcripture, is abſolutely unavoidable, and therefore not inconſiſtent with the moral attributes of God; ſo I ſhall endeavour to make it appear no leſs evident, that our ignorance, in other points, where it is not abſolutely unavoidable, is however abſolutely neceſſary in order to anſwer the wiſe purpoſes of God with regard to our own happi-

happineſs, and therefore perfectly conſiſtent with the proper end of an extraordinary revelation.

Suppoſing it were an innocent piece of curioſity, yet it would certainly be a very vain one in us, who are ſo little acquainted with the poſſibilities and fitneſſes of things, to want to know, whether any other diſpoſition of human affairs, could in every reſpect, including the whole ſyſtem of created intelligences, be as perfect and convenient as that which is already eſtabliſhed: It is pretty certain however, as circumſtances are now ordained, that a ſtate of trial is quite eſſential to the intereſts of humanity; that the diſcipline we meet with in this probationary life, is a neceſſary means of training us up to thoſe habits of vir-

tue and knowledge, without which it would be impoſſible for us to be qualified for any further advancement in the univerſe. Whilſt we conſider men, as men, we can hardly conceive it poſſible even for God Himſelf to communicate thoſe habits of goodneſs to us, all at once, which He hath rendered us capable of procuring, by ſlow degrees, under the preſent diſcipline of his providence: For all habits are our own proper and perſonal acquirements, and ſuch acquirements, as can only be obtained by the leiſurely method of repeated efforts, and a gradual courſe of probation. Every one therefore, who is capable of taking an enlarged and comprehenſive view of the natural conditions of his being, would abſtractedly from the conſidera-

ſideration of Chriſtianity, have all the reaſon imaginable to preſume, if God was to ſend a meſſenger from Heaven to preach a new religion to the world, that its duties would not be entirely free from difficulties; nor its doctrines, in all reſpects, be perfectly clear and intelligible; any more than its rewards and puniſhments would be immediately conſequent upon our neglect, or obſervance of it; ſince ſuch a religion would be quite at variance with the uniform conduct of its ſuppoſed author, in his original creation, and preſent ordinary government of mankind.

There is no doubt but we are all ſupplied with every requiſite power and opportunity for obtaining as great degrees of happineſs, as our reſpective natures

natures will admit of, either in this or a future life. But then it is to be obſerved that our happineſs is only conditional. It is not directly put into our hands, in the form of a gift; but it is placed at a diſtance from us, and but juſt within our reach, on purpoſe that it may be made a ſeeming acquirement of our own, and its value enhanced by the methods we are obliged to take in order to obtain it: Nor are theſe methods to be diſcovered without much ſerious and diſcreet conſideration; nor ſucceſsfully purſued without a continued and animated exertion of our beſt endeavours. And was not this the caſe, we ſhould have no opportunity of exemplifying the goodneſs or badneſs of our moral diſpoſitions: Was there no difficulty in walk-

walking in the right way, nor any temptation to deviate from it, there could be no merit or demerit in either; and conſequently no room for reward or puniſhment, nor any poſſible ground for the expectation of a future judgment.

Whatever difficulties therefore there may be in the Chriſtian religion, yet I do not ſee how they can be inconſiſtent with the proper end of an extraordinary revelation, unleſs an improvement of our moral characters be ſo likewiſe. For a careful diſcharge of our duty, on imperfect and barely probable evidence, is expreſſive of a much better diſpoſition than a like careful diſcharge of it, on the evidence of demonſtration. So that the goſpel *imputation of righteouſneſs unto faith*, is a doc-

a doctrine of equity, as well as mercy; there being as great a ſcope for an immoral, or virtuous conduct, with reſpect to what we believe, as with reſpect to what we practiſe. The excellence of faith, I mean of ſuch a faith, as has any natural tendency to promote the practice of religion and virtue, is gradually diminiſhed, as it approaches towards the confines of certainty; and, as long as it has any real evidence at all for its ſupport, grows more and more meritorious, as it deſcends through all the varying degrees of perſuaſion, from the utmoſt height of moral conviction, quite down to the loweſt point of bare probability. On the other hand, an obſtinate determination to reject every thing in the ſacred ſcriptures, that

does not carry along with it ſome internal proof of its truth and uſefulneſs, muſt proceed from what St. *Paul* very properly ſtyles, an *evil heart of unbelief*. For licentious thinking is, in a true eſtimate of things, as ſtrong an indication of a depraved temper, as licentious living. To determine raſhly upon religious ſubjects, or to diſregard them entirely, upon account of the diſputes and diviſions they occaſion, is, at leaſt, as wrong and faulty a behaviour, as a neglect of ſelf-government on any other occaſion. This is ſo clear a truth, that every one who thinks at all, muſt needs be convinced of it, whether he chuſes to be influenced by it, or not: For no one, ſurely, will pretend to prove, that religious duties are of leſs importance

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than any other; or that an abuſe of the higher principles of our nature, of our reaſon, our underſtanding, and conſcience, is not ſo criminal as an inordinate indulgence of our appetites, paſſions, and affections.

It is the natural condition of humanity, that we ſhould remain in a ſtate of probation, as long as we continue in this life; nor was the goſpel Revelation deſigned to put us out of ſuch a ſtate; but only to change the ſcene, and circumſtances of it. So far are men from being exempted from trials by the helps of Chriſtianity, that they are really, as Chriſtians, expoſed to much greater trials than they were before, as much greater, as the grace of God, and the light of the goſpel, are more able and ſufficient guides

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than ſenſe and reaſon. Nor can we conceive how it ſhould be otherwiſe: Our difficulties muſt needs increaſe with our duties; and the number and greatneſs of our duties, will always riſe in proportion to our abilities. From thoſe, *to whom much is given, will much be required*; and it will be required, becauſe he who gives it, will not fail to ſupply the receivers with every ſuitable opportunity of doing as much as they are qualified to perform. As *God Almighty will not ſuffer us to be tempted above that we are able*, ſo neither will He be ſo waſteful of his power, as to furniſh us with any ſuperfluous ſtrength. If therefore He endows us with any extraordinary abilities, we may depend upon it, that it is for ſome extraordinary purpoſes.

In

In this ſenſe, neither his grace, nor any other of his gifts, can be wholly beſtowed upon us in vain; becauſe He Himſelf will be ſure to make them anſwer the ends of his providence, as means of trial, though we ſhould refuſe to accompliſh his further deſign, and neglect to uſe them as the means of our own happineſs. But the ſuccours of his holy ſpirit would be needleſsly laviſhed away upon us, were they not rather deſigned to fortify us againſt temptations, than to exempt us from them; for if we were to be freed from the latter, there would then be no occaſion for the former, ſince our weakneſs, in ſuch a caſe, would no longer be any hindrance to our ſecurity. But ſecurity is a privilege that belongs

belongs not to this world; we muſt be content to wait for that, till we have finiſhed our warfare, till we are placed beyond the reach of temptations; and no ſuch ſituation can be obtained on this ſide Heaven.—It is very probable that there may be men, who, by a long continuance in the practice of virtue, have brought themſelves to ſuch a habit of temperance, as to feel little or no temptation to give into any of thoſe vices, which the generality of people are moſt apt to be guilty of. But it will by no means follow from hence, that they are upon that account, expoſed to no temptations at all. The only thing they are likely to gain by ſuch an exemption, is an opportunity of being advanced to ſome higher de-

gree of trial; from the ſmaller inſtances of duty, to more important articles of moral diſcipline; from practical encounters, to ſpeculative difficulties; from trials of ſenſe, to trials of faith. For if theſe men who are ſuppoſed, by a cuſtomary regulation of their appetites and paſſions, to have freed themſelves from all the ordinary temptations to ſin; if theſe men, I ſay, were to be as ſecure of committing no offence, with regard to the conduct of their underſtandings and conſciences, in any other reſpect, they would ceaſe to be probationary beings, and, of courſe, be placed out of a condition of anſwering the only conceivable ends of providence, in keeping them any longer in this world.

world.* From theſe conſiderations we may collect a very ſatisfactory reaſon, why Chriſtianity is not without its ſpeculative, as well as its practical difficulties; and as it has been already ſhown that ſome things in it, muſt be obſcure through neceſſity, ſo is it very probable that others were left ſo on purpoſe that they might conſtitute the peculiar probation of ſuch, as would want a ſufficient means of trial without them, of ſuch, for inſtance, as God hath endowed with a ſtrong un-

* As to the caſe of idiots and madmen, which ſeems to make againſt the truth of this reaſoning, it will be neceſſary only to obſerve, that nothing can be ſo univerſally predicated of human nature, but what is equally liable to ſome exception or other; and that it is, in general, as juſt a proportion, to affirm that all men are probationary beings, as to affirm they are rational, free, and accountable agents.

derſtanding, and a virtuous diſpoſition, or placed in ſuch circumſtances, as afford an uncommon opportunity for the exerciſe of reaſon, and lay a peculiar reſtraint on the gratification of paſſion. Thus much however is certain, that the doctrines of the goſpel are calculated to afford ſufficient means of trial to all men, under every poſſible degree of advancement, in their progreſs towards perfection: As we are required to *grow in grace*, ſo are we ſupplied with different ſorts of ſpiritual food, ſuited to the increaſing ſtrength of our digeſtion; as the word abounds with that *ſincere milk* which is neceſſary for the nouriſhment of *babes in Chriſt*, ſo likewiſe does it not want for ſuch *ſtrong meat*, as is requiſite for *them that are of full age, even thoſe who, by*

*by reaſon of uſe, have their ſenſes exerciſed to diſcern both good and evil.**

When it is ſaid that *life and immortality are brought to light by the goſpel*, it is neither meant, that we were entirely in the dark, with regard to life and immortality, before the revelation of the goſpel, nor that we have, even now, any clear and diſtinct view of thoſe things which belong to a future ſtate. Our viſion, with all this aſſiſtance, is ſtill but very imperfect; we do even yet, according to the acknowledgment of St. *Paul*, *ſee* only, as it were *through a glaſs, darkly*. It

* I would recommend it to the thoughtful reader, to conſider whether theſe obſervations are not, of themſelves, a ſufficient refutation of the doctrines of aſſurance and perfection, maintained by the methodiſts.

ſeems, indeed, that the apoſtle, by this metaphor, refers to the obſcure images of a reflecting mirrour, as no unfit ſimilitude of that imperfect repreſentation of ſpiritual things, which is exhibited to our underſtandings, in our preſent ſtate of *partial* diſcernment. But it will be altogether as juſt, and rather more appoſite to my preſent purpoſe, to take occaſion, from this paſſage, to borrow a metaphor from a glaſs of that kind, which is calculated to improve our natural viſion in a perſpective way; and to obſerve, that, notwithſtanding all the extraordinary inſight, which the goſpel, like a good perſpective glaſs, has given us into heavenly things, yet do we ſtill, abſolutely ſpeaking, ſee but very little, and that little but very imper-

imperfectly. There is ſuch a ſtrict propriety in this ſimilitude, that it may be worth while to illuſtrate it a little more particularly. Though there are many objects in that vaſt convexity of the Heavens which ſurround us, that are ſufficiently bright to ſtrike the naked eye, yet it muſt be allowed that the Satellites of Jupiter and Saturn, and an infinite number of ſmall fixt ſtars, could never have been brought within the reach of our obſervation, without the aſſiſtance of a teleſcope. But, notwithſtanding our viſion has been thus improved, by the intervention of this ſupernatural medium, as we may call it; yet how inconſiderable is it, even in its preſent degree of perfection and extent. All the new objects that are diſcloſed to

us by this means, are but very imperfectly diſtinguiſhed, and, as to moſt of them, it is impoſſible that their diſcovery ſhould enlarge our knowledge any otherwiſe, than barely by convincing us of their exiſtence; And what are theſe, in point of number, to thoſe which ſtill remain inviſible to us? What are the primary and ſecondary planets in this our ſolar ſyſtem, or the ſyſtems of all thoſe fixt ſtars, which not only our eye thus aſſiſted, but even our utmoſt imagination can comprehend; what are all theſe, I ſay, to thoſe myriads of bodies which are diffuſed throughout the regions of infinite ſpace? Now the caſe is juſt the ſame, with regard to the goſpel, that heavenly teleſcope to the eye of the mind. This world, from

from the time of its firſt creation, has ever been inhabited by men, who could naturally diſcover enough of another, to engage their contemplation. Even thoſe who lived in the darkeſt days of heatheniſh ignorance, had ſome glimmering proſpect of a future ſtate. But though the antient philoſophers were well aſſured they ſaw ſomething beyond the verge of this life, yet could they not, with any certainty, determine what it was: Imagination was obliged to ſupply the defect of ſight, and the reſult of all their ſpeculation was but little better than mere conjecture. This proſpect indeed, hath ſince been greatly cleared up to us, by the light of the goſpel, and ſome of thoſe things are, at length, laid open to our view, which were

were before involved in clouds of impenetrable darkneſs. But notwithſtanding all the ſupernatural aſſiſtance which the goſpel affords, yet, even through this cleareſt of mediums, do we ſtill ſee but *darkly*. Our views, though much more diſtinct and extenſive than they were before, are ſtill, not only confined within a very ſmall compaſs, with reſpect to what lies beyond them, but very partial and confuſed, even as far as they reach. But then, it is to be obſerved, that this defect can be no argument either againſt the uſe, or the neceſſity of the goſpel; for if our own occaſions, and the ends of providence, are ſufficiently anſwered by thoſe diſcoveries, which are already made, there can be no reaſon aſſigned, why more ſhould have

been communicated; but there is a very good reaſon why more ſhould not; for as the goſpel was only meant to aſſiſt us in overcoming the temptations of this life, and not to exempt us from them; it was proper that it ſhould afford only ſuch a degree of conviction, as was ſufficient to influence our faith, not ſuch as might overrule our will; ſuch as was ſtrong enough to ſatisfy the juſt expectations of reaſon, not ſuch as might gratify the deſires of an impertinent and uſeleſs curioſity.*

* This alluſion has ſuggeſted to me an obſervation in favour of the uſe of reaſon, in matters of religion. For of what ſignification can it be that the goſpel affords us ſo clear a medium for the diſcovery of heavenly things, if reaſon, which is the eye of the mind, be not priviledged to uſe it, as ſuch: It would, I think, be altogether as ab-

There

There is one circumſtance indeed, in which the foregoing parallel ſeems a little deficient, and that is, our incapacity of extending our knowledge to ſuch lengths, and with ſuch certainty, in matters of religion, as in thoſe of philoſophy. It is pretty clear, I think, that we are, in general, much better acquainted with the ſubjects of mere abſtract ſcience, and the conſtitution of God's natural government of the world, than with the diſpenſations of his moral providence. Thoſe laws, by which the motion of the heavenly bodies are regulated, are much better known to us, than thoſe,

ſurd for any one to forbear employing his reaſon, becauſe he has the goſpel always by him, as to put out his eyes, as uſeleſs, becauſe he is in poſſeſſion of a good teleſcope.

by

by which the turns in human affairs are conducted, though there is as much reaſon to ſuppoſe that theſe, as being equally under the ſuperintendence of the ſame infinite wiſdom, are as orderly managed as the other. Now to ſome, perhaps, it will ſeem ſtrange, that we ſhould be capable of acquiring a greater degree of certainty, in matters that are hardly of any concernment to us at all, than in things that may be thought of the moſt eſſential conſequence to our happineſs, both here, and hereafter. But if we conſider this world only as a ſtate of trial, and if we reflect at all, it is impoſſible we ſhould conſider it in any other light, it will no longer appear ſtrange, that there ſhould be ſuch a wide difference in our knowledge,

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with reſpect to theſe ſeveral particulars. For as to thoſe things, which were only deſigned to try the diſpoſition of our hearts, it is abſolutely neceſſary that our knowledge of them, ſhould not, in any inſtance, exceed the bounds of a lively faith, or moral perſuaſion. But as there is not the ſame reaſon, why our knowledge ſhould be ſo much limitted, with regard to things of an indifferent nature, or ſuch as are not ſufficiently intereſting to have any conſiderable influence on our behaviour; ſo neither is it any wonder, that an indulgent creator ſhould, in reſpect of theſe, allow us a much larger ſcope for the progreſs of our underſtandings, and permit us, in ſome inſtances, either for the mere amuſement, or better external accommodation of our lives,

lives, to make ſome little acquiſitions of abſolute ſcience.

Thus have I endeavoured to give a full and ſatisfactory anſwer to the two firſt objections againſt the credibility of myſteries, conſidered as articles of a divine revelation. And if it has been proved, partly from the conſideration of their neceſſity, and partly from the conſideration of their expediency, that they are perfectly conſiſtent with the moral attributes of God, and the proper ends of an extraordinary revelation, it will follow of courſe, that they cannot be repugnant to a rational faith: And if it has alſo been proved that all objections againſt the divine original of the goſpel, when improperly conſidered as a matter of abſtract inquiry, are as weak

and

weak and inconcluſive, as any that have been more lawfully urged againſt it under a pretence of its being a diſputable matter of fact; if this, I ſay, has been proved, it will then, on the contrary, be extremely repugnant to reaſon, not to give our ready aſſent to all its doctrines, however incomprehenſible, as to their abſtract nature, provided they are but ſufficiently intelligible and determinate, in their literal ſignification.*

* The method I have here taken of defending, at large, whatever may ſeem difficult, or inexplicable in the goſpel diſpenſation, is, I think, much preferable to any limited vindication of detached and ſingle doctrines; ſince it not only ſeems to remove the objections, which may be diſtinctly urged againſt thoſe ſeveral doctrines; but admits, likewiſe, of ſuch an extenſive and unexceptionable application to all, in the way of preſumptive proof as will, in a manner, preclude the uſe of every argument, that has been appropriated to a ſeparate examination.

And

And had the generality of mankind all thoſe advantages of education, which would give them as great an inſight into the ways of God, and their own nature, as they are capable of obtaining; and could they moreover but bring themſelves to ſuch a pious and humble diſpoſition of mind, as might thoroughly chaſtiſe the pride and inſolence of human ſcience; then might we with ſafety exhort them to a free and unreſerved uſe of their rational faculties, on the *great myſtery of godlineſs:* Since the moſt nice examination of it, on ſuch a ſuppoſition, would be ſure to give their underſtandings a proportional degree of ſatisfaction; awaken their conſciences to a more effectual ſenſe of its great im-

portance; and fill their hearts with unſpeakable gratitude and devotion.

But notwithſtanding that reaſon is the only guide we are furniſhed with, to direct us in all caſes whatſoever, not excepting what are reckoned mere matters of faith; and though we are, upon that account, not only privileged, but ſtrictly obliged to be aſſiduous in the exerciſe and cultivation of it; yet it is to be laid down as a certain and moſt important truth, that no one can ſafely confide in his head, unleſs he is very careful to keep a jealous and watchful guard over his heart. For the ſupreme authority of reaſon, is often openly acknowledged, when 'tis privately but very little regarded: Our luſts and appetites will often, by an artful inſinuation, become her chief

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counſellors and favourites; and when they have once brought her to liſten to their expoſtulations, they will then, like other evil miniſters in the ſame circumſtances, gain an eaſy aſcendant over their lawful ſovereign. If we are inclinable therefore to ſecure the everlaſting welfare of our ſouls, let us take up an honeſt reſolution to keep all the inferior powers of our nature in due ſubjection to the allowed ſupremacy of reaſon. And if we would but ſeriouſly advert upon the ſcanty principles of human knowledge, and that imperfect ſort of evidence which we are naturally appointed to act upon; and, after that, be ready to pay an abſolute and unreſerved obedience to the matureſt determinations of our reaſon, on religious ſubjects; then, I am

pretty

pretty confident, we ſhould ſoon find it an eaſy matter to learn the wiſe leſſon of faith; then we ſhould think it the trueſt, as well as the ſafeſt philoſophy, to diſtruſt our own underſtanding, becauſe it may deceive us, and to confide in God's goodneſs, becauſe it cannot; to *receive with meekneſs, and all readineſs, that wiſdom which is from above*, and to follow St. *Paul's* moſt rational example, in *counting all things but loſs, for the excellency of the knowledge of Chriſt Jeſus our Lord.*

FINIS.